NOT ONLY FOR OUR SINS BUT FOR THE WHOLE WORLD:

1 JOHN 2:2 AGAINST THE JEWISH BACKGROUND OF 1 JOHN

BY

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PURPOSE OF STUDY: To interpret 1 John 2:2 against the background of an intra-Jewish background of the Epistle.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH: The research will argue for an intra-Jewish background of 1 John's central conflict. Against this background, it will analyze the grammar of 1 John 2:2, its place in the structure of the epistle as a whole, and the epistle's utilization of concepts within Second Temple Judaism to define what is meant by "the whole world" in 2:2d.

I attest that the information provided herein is a valid representation of the proposed research activity and that no information will be obtained from or about living human subjects.

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ABSTRACT

The majority approach to 1 John since the early part of the twentieth century has been that the Epistle addresses a nascent form of proto-Gnosticism which denied the material, fleshly reality of the Christ figure. More recently, scholars have raised questions against this prevailing hypothesis, both internal to the Epistle, and historiographic. A minority group of scholars has proposed that 1 John, as well as the other Johannine epistles, reflect an intra-Jewish dispute between a Christian community and certain Jewish members who have recanted the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. When read against this Jewish background, 1 John 2:2, in particular, 1 John 2:2d, receives a different meaning from this context. First John 2:2, καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, ought to be read, "And he is himself an atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins, but also for the whole world." The final clause is a reference to the concept of the purification of physical space and its contents from the influence of evil spiritual powers in the Day of Atonement ritual as understood in the Second Temple period. This understanding becomes clear when one reads 1 John 2:2 within the Epistle as a whole and its themes, within the Epistle's structure, and against the background of Second Temple Jewish literature and thought. This dissertation will, by elucidating the particular case of 1 John 2:2, add to the case for the ability of the intra-Jewish hypothesis to better account for the contents of the Epistle than other proposed alternatives.

DEDICATION PAGE

Dedicated to my father, James E. De Young, who inspired in me my love for the Scriptures and for learning.

Also dedicated to Dr. Daniel Fletcher, who shepherded this dissertation into existence in its earliest phases through his advice, assistance, and enthusiasm for the subject matter.

May God grant them rest where the just repose and may their memories be eternal..

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I. INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of 1 John is tied together with the central issue of the identity of its original recipients.[1] There has been a schism of some sort within the community as is made plain by repeated negative references to this second group (2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:6). Several strategies, most commonly "mirror-reading" or defining the position of the opponents based upon John's[2] criticisms and affirmations read in reverse, have been used to attempt a reconstruction of these adversaries. Interpreters then use these reconstructions as a background against which the text of the Epistle itself is read and form a key interpretive element.

First John 2:2 is a text which interpreters typically have not read against this background. Interpretations of the text are stable across a broad range of identifications of 1 John's opponents and a broad period despite shifts in understanding of the background of the Epistles. The intra-Jewish hypothesis posits the point of schism within the Johannine community as being of Jewish background and nature. Against this background, 1 John 2:2 takes on new significance. Specifically, the opponents addressed in the first epistle have, following a previous nominal acceptance, rejected the identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Against this

[1] This particular issue was surveyed thoroughly in the history of the interpretation of 1 John by Daniel R. Streett, *They Went Out from Us: The Identity of the Opponents in First John*. Beihefts zur Zeirschrift fur die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 177, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011.

[2] "John" is used as an identifier for the author of the First Epistle here and throughout this dissertation. This is without claim expressed or implied as to the identity of the author, as it represents a question beyond the scope of the present argument.

background, 1 John 2:2 is integrated more adequately into the teaching, structure, and literary flow of the Epistle.

This integration, in turn, gives the intra-Jewish hypothesis greater explanatory power regarding the data of 1 John. A key standard of comparison between competing hypotheses as to the origin and audience of the Epistle is the degree to which they can explain and encompass the totality of 1 John's text and teaching. The intra-Jewish hypothesis regarding the background of 1 John interprets and explains the text of 1 John 2:2 more coherently than competing hypotheses by taking it into account as data. In return, this more coherent understanding of 1 John 2:2 then serves as further evidence for the validity of the intra-Jewish hypothesis.

A. Statement of the Problem and Background

The majority approach to 1 John since the early part of the twentieth century has been that the Epistle addresses a nascent form of proto-Gnosticism which denied the material, fleshly reality of the Christ figure. More recently, scholars have raised questions against this prevailing hypothesis, both internal to the Epistle and historiographic.[3] A minority group of scholars has proposed that 1 John, as well as the other Johannine epistles, reflect an intra-Jewish dispute between a Christian community and certain Jewish members who have recanted the belief that

[3] Raymond Brown famously proposed one such alternative hypothesis, though not the one taken by this dissertation. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*. New York: Paulist, 1979. Other than the Intra-Jewish hypothesis as here discussed, however, all the major theories can be broadly categorized within the "proto-Gnostic" umbrella. Brown, for example, believes the community represented by John's opponents to have evolved into a docetic or Gnostic community later in its development. Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 103–104.

Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.[4] When read against this intra-Jewish background, 1 John 2:2, in particular, 1 John 2:2d, receives a new significance from this context. This dissertation will, by elucidating the particular case of 1 John 2:2, add to the case for the ability of the intra-Jewish hypothesis to better account for the contents of the Epistle than other proposed alternatives.

Through the process of "mirror-reading," various attempts have been made to reconstruct the beliefs of those opposed by John in the First Epistle. It is then common to attempt to connect the reconstructed opponents to specific historical sects of the early Christian centuries.[5] While scholars have treated perceived similarities with one or more of these groups as confirmatory of their hypothesized communities, they granted little in the way of interpretive force for 1 John, as in general very little is known about these early groups which could make such a contribution. References to these groups in early Christian writers describe only significant points of difference between these communities and that of the writer in question. They do not give a full-orbed presentation of the life and beliefs of these communities.

What we know regarding the beliefs of these communities is, again, not known primarily from their writings. Even where such writings exist, they are generally from a much later period than that of the composition of 1 John. Connecting these writings to any particular group, let alone a particular group in the first century, is therefore conjectural at best. For the most part, what is known about the beliefs of these groups is known through the same sort of "mirror-reading" which produces the hypothesized opponent community of 1 John. Even this is further

[4] Among current key texts in support of this view are Birger Olsson, *A Commentary on the Letters of John*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013 and Judith M. Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, Louisville, US: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2008.

[5] The chief candidates are the Docetists as described by Ignatius of Antioch and various actual or hypothesized Gnostic sects, in particular that founded by Cerinthus. These are generally categorized as "proto-Gnostic" due to the full emergence of Gnostic sects occurring only in the second century CE and later.

complicated by the possession of more sources regarding some of these communities than for the community of the Johannine epistles, such that there is seeming disagreement or incompatibility in competing accounts of the same group. Comparisons are not the comparison of a hypothetical community to a historical one but between two hypothetical communities. Competing hypotheses regarding both communities make such identifications tenuous at best.

Even given the hypothetical nature of reconstructions of these ancient communities, none of the offered identifications can offer a complete match to the equally hypothetical reconstruction of the Epistle's opponents. In each case, there are data points from early Christian writers regarding these communities which find no equivalent in the text of 1 John and are even inconsistent with its picture of the opponents. Likewise, while each of the data points of the key opponent passages in 1 John (2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:6) finds a parallel in the beliefs of certain early communities as reconstructed, the totality of this data is not reflected in any of them. These reconstructed beliefs then require further conjectures, either concerning the Johannine opponent community or the early historical community, to complete a match. Scholars base these conjectures on nothing more than the mismatch between the hypothetical communities and the desire to remedy this discontinuity.

Second Temple Judaism, in the present era, is far more well-known and well-sourced. The Judaism of the first century CE, or more properly Judaisms, offers the potential for far greater confidence in a potential identification under the intra-Jewish hypothesis.[6] A hypothetical opponent community addressed by 1 John is, under this hypothesis, compared to known

[6] It is this more in-depth understanding of the Judaisms of the first century CE which has brought about the emergence of the intra-Jewish hypothesis regarding the opponents of 1 John. It has also brought about re-evaluation of the Jewish background of the Gospel of John, as surveyed by Urban C. Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and the Judaisms of the First Century*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.

historical communities rather than to a hypothetical reconstruction. The full range of the data presented by the First Epistle finds parallel within the Judaism of the period in its various forms offering the potential to encompass all of the Johannine data through a single explanation. Such an identification, due to the greater wealth of data available concerning Second Temple Judaism's beliefs, practices, and textual traditions, also offers the potential to give further significant explanatory data points to expand the understanding of the Johannine opponent community. Such an identification, once established, offers further interpretive possibilities for the text of 1 John.

The interpretation of 1 John 2:2 is typically unaffected in its interpretation by the hypothesis adopted regarding the identity of the Johannine opponents. It is not considered one of the passages which directly refer to the opponents or their viewpoint. The identification of the opponent passages (2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:6) is a selection of certain portions of the text among other potential candidates. First John 2:2 contains the same argument structure, "not only," as 5:6, for example. John's argument that Christ came "by water and blood" and not "by water only" is taken to indicate that the latter is the position of the opponents. Various forms of the proto-Gnostic hypothesis, particularly the identification of the Johannine opponents with a form of Cerinthianism, benefit from such a "mirror-reading" of 5:6. On the other hand, John's argument that Christ is an atonement "not only for our sins" but also, "for the whole world" bears no clear connection to any known form of Docetic or Gnostic belief. It is therefore not considered to be a passage with any reference to the view of the opponents.

The various forms of the proto-Gnostic hypothesis fail to integrate 1 John 2:2 into the text of the Epistle and its argument. Because it is not taken to be related to the opponents addressed by the Epistle, its intended audience and the situation addressed by the statement of 1

John 2:2 remain undefined. Interpreters then treat John's statement regarding the atoning sacrifice of Christ in a vacuum. This untethered interpretation has led to its application to a variety of theological debates with no reference to the Epistle's original audience. Chiefly, 1 John 2:2 has been used as a proof-text against views of particular or limited atonement. Proponents of such views have reinterpreted the text so as not to oppose their particular form of atonement doctrine. These reinterpretations have no direct reference to the audience or general *Sitz im Leben* of the First Epistle.

The intra-Jewish hypothesis, once established, can integrate 1 John 2:2 into the overall address and argument of 1 John. Specifically, 1 John 2:1–2 describe two elements of Christ's role as high priest. First John 2:2 further describes two elements of the atoning sacrifice offered by Christ in this role. If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Messiah and if the Messiah has not yet come, then this role has not been fulfilled. If the Messiah has not come, then this sacrifice has not been offered. The traditional opponent passages assert, over against the opponents within this intra-Jewish dispute, that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah who has come. First John 2:2 is part of a series of passages which describe the consequences in the life and belief of the Johannine community if the opponents were correct in their denial.

B. Purpose Statement

This dissertation will interpret 1 John 2:2 against the background of a dispute within a community which is Jewish in character and integrate its teaching into the structure and themes of 1 John as a whole. First John 2:2, καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, ought to be read, "And he is a

propitiation for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the whole world." The final clause is a reference to the concept of the purification of sacred space from the influence of evil spiritual powers in the Day of Atonement ritual as understood in the Second Temple period. What the high priest ritually performed on the Day of Atonement was performed concerning not only the people but the physical space of the camp and its contents. In a later historical phase, he performed the ritual for the sins of the people and then the nation and its contents. John asserts that Christ has done this concerning not only the people within the community but also the physical space of the whole world and its contents.

This interpretation of 1 John 2:2 comes into relief against the background of the conflict which the First Epistle addresses. A significant portion of the Johannine Christian community has renounced the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. First John then has two purposes. The first is to reassert the identification of Jesus as the Messiah seen in the traditionally identified passages (2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:6) which refer to the beliefs of the schismatic element of the community.[7] The second is to describe the consequence to the belief and life of the community of the opponents' renunciation. First John 2:2 is a part of the latter argument.

The intra-Jewish hypothesis has explanatory power in accounting for the textual data of 1 John. The interpretation of 1 John 2:2 against this background demonstrates that it has superior explanatory power to the prevalent alternatives. This explanatory power offers further evidence for the validity of the intra-Jewish hypothesis as the identity of the opponents and the situation which the First Epistle addresses. This hypothesis allows 1 John 2:2 to be interpreted within the

[7] Certainly not all of the text of the Epistle is directed toward the secessionists. These passages, the "opponents passages" are distinguished because they clearly refer to a group which has left the Johannine community. In addition to these texts, a significant portion of the text is aimed toward the edification and strengthening of the remaining Johannine community.

overarching argument of the Epistle rather than as an outlying passage. The intra-Jewish hypothesis interprets 1 John 2:2 with greater clarity, while the interpretation's clarity and integration with the rest of the Epistle argue in favor of the intra-Jewish hypothesis by serving as a positive test of its explanatory power.

Through an understanding of its place in the argument of the Epistle and considered against the background of an intra-Jewish dispute, 1 John 2:2 becomes the key text in the Epistle's teaching on the nature of the atonement. First John teaches a view of the atonement in Christ grounded in fulfillment of atonement as comprehended by the ritual practice of the Day of Atonement. Christ performs that function performed by the high priest once a year for the nation of Israel. He performs it, however, for the entire creation and its contents. Within the argument of 1 John, this is a key element of the profile of Jesus as Messiah. If Jesus is not the Messiah, and therefore the Messiah has not come, then this atoning function has not been performed. The still unfulfilled messianic promises would leave all people still in their sins and under the power of the evil one.

C. Methodology

In support of the thesis, this dissertation will argue for the Jewish background of 1 John. The majority viewpoint, which regards the Epistle as an argument against proto-Gnosticism, will be described. The three most common forms of the proto-Gnostic hypothesis are an identification of the Johannine opponents with the Docetists, a form of early Gnosticism proper, or the Cerinthian version of Gnosticism in particular. This dissertation will describe the arguments in favor of these identifications and the insufficiency of these hypotheses to explain the data of 1 John fully. The dissertation will then briefly describe and critique Raymond Brown's later hypothesis,

which posits the dispute between the Johannine community and the schismatics as a difference of interpretation of John's Gospel. Finally, the dissertation will describe the arguments for a particular version of the intra-Jewish hypothesis, that the opponents addressed by 1 John have recanted a previous confession that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. The focus of these arguments will be the superior explanatory power of this hypothesis.

In relation to the intra-Jewish hypothesis, this dissertation will describe the thematic connections between the First Epistle and John's Gospel, along with a survey of the arguments for the intra-Jewish background of the Gospel text. The demonstration of these connections will allow for a combined case in favor of the intra-Jewish hypothesis of the Epistle's background. This hypothesis will elaborate on the background against which the text of 1 John 2:2 will be read. The identification of the opponents of 1 John and the members of the Johannine community itself as of a background which locates itself within Second Temple Judaism will form the basis for the interpretation of the Epistle and the thematic threads which run through its text. The remainder of the argument, regarding the interpretation of 1 John 2:2 and its place in the overall argument of the Epistle will flow from this background once established.

After establishing this background, this dissertation will proceed to the text of 1 John 2:2 itself. This verse has been translated nearly universally in English with the supply of the demonstrative pronoun or the words "the sins of" in the second half of the verse. As an example, the ESV reads, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world."[8] The NASB has the more reserved rendering, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world," with the additional supplied words here italicized. These added words appear in their Greek equivalent in

[8] Italicization mine.

no known manuscripts of 1 John. Further, seen against the Jewish background of the text, they are unnecessary.[9]

By working from the text, this dissertation will seek to connect 1 John 2:2d thematically, specifically the meaning of Christ as atonement "περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου," to two other sections of the later text of 1 John. The only other use of the phrase "ὁ κόσμος ὅλος" in the Epistle occurs in 1 John 5:19, which states that "the whole world lies beneath the evil one." The other significant passage occurs in 1 John 3:5–8. First John 3:5 states that Christ appeared to take away (lit. "to lift up," αἴρω) sin, paralleling 1 John 2:2a. First John 3:8 states that the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil, paralleling 1 John 2:2d by way of the identification of 5:19. This dissertation will argue for the thematic connection of these texts in the Epistle along two lines.

The first line of argumentation will propose a structure for 1 John in which there is a cyclical arrangement of themes. The text of the Epistle introduces, then expands upon, then concludes these themes throughout the text. Variations of this thematic, structural model, be it as a series of cycles or a spiral or inverted cone are common organizational structures read out of the text of the First Epistle.[10] First John 2:2 represents an initial statement of one of these thematic units which wind through the text of the Epistle as a whole. This particular theme represents the understanding, within the context of the Day of Atonement ritual as practiced in Second Temple Judaism, of the purification of sacred space from the dominion of hostile spiritual powers. When it is viewed against the background of the intra-Jewish hypothesis, this

[9] This grammatical argument has been summarized by Toan Joseph Do, "Does περὶ ὁλου τοῦ κόσμου Imply 'the Sins of the Whole World' in 1 John 2,2?" *Biblica* 94 (2013): 415–435.

[10] Lenski argues for one form of this overarching structure for the Epistle as an inverted pyramid or cone in R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945. Jobes describes it as circular and structured around a series of intertwined themes in Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

theme represents one of several consequences of the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah who has come through a reflection on the results of his offered atoning sacrifice.

The second line of argumentation connecting these passages within the Epistle will identify the atonement referred to in 1 John 2:2 with the Day of Atonement ritual.[11] Though this ritual is described originally in Lev 16, for purposes of this dissertation the ritual as practiced and understood in the Second Temple period, before and contemporaneous with the writing of the Epistle is the relevant data.[12] Second Temple Jewish literature describes Azazel, the figure in the ritual of Lev 16 for whom one of the goats is selected, as a devil figure using terms reminiscent of those used in the Epistle.[13]

1 Enoch 10:8 states that "the whole earth has been corrupted by the works which Azazel taught, so ascribe to him all sin." The Apocalypse of Abraham also describes Azazel as a hostile spiritual entity who controls the wilderness area outside the fringes of Israelite and later Judean civilization. This dissertation will not argue for literary dependence of the Epistle upon these Second Temple texts, but only that these texts represent a portion of the conceptual field understood by a first century CE Jewish writer and hearer.[14] This section of this dissertation will also include a discussion of the related concept of sacred space and its purification in relation to sin, atonement, and evil spiritual entities. The Day of Atonement ritual served the function of separating the camp from the surrounding world as a purified sacred space, removed from the

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[11] Olsson devotes an appendix to this topic. Olsson, *Letters*, 300–303.

[12] This means that various questions regarding the origin, history, and source material for the Leviticus account are not relevant. By the first century CE, Lev 16 had achieved its current, canonical form.

[13] It is ambiguous at best whether the "Azazel" of Lev 16 originally represented a demonic figure. By the first century CE, however, Azazel was commonly used as a name for Satan or the Devil. Specifically, it is the name used for this figure in relation to discussions of atonement.

[14] First John, in particular, speaks of the devil or the evil one in ways directly paralleled in Second Temple Jewish literature. These references are also structurally connected to 1 John 2:2.

influence of malign spiritual powers, as represented by Azazel. This purification is extended to the whole world in the superior atoning sacrifice of Christ in 1 John 2:2.

Finally, this dissertation will conclude by directly arguing the thesis. Seen in the light of the Jewish background of the Epistle, 1 John 2:2 describes two effects of the atonement of Christ parallel to the two elements of the Day of Atonement ritual. The first is the cleansing of sin. The second, the focus of the dissertation is the purification of the effects of sin upon the whole world conceived of as a physical space and its contents. This purification both removes the uncleanness produced by sin but frees the space and its contents from the power of the evil one by destroying the works of the devil. By demonstrating that the intra-Jewish hypothesis better explains 1 John 2:2 and its role in the Epistle as a whole, this dissertation will argue for the intra-Jewish hypothesis over other proposed alternatives.

D. Contribution and Originality

This dissertation will represent a contribution on the side of the minority position that 1 John is directed to an intra-Jewish context. It will demonstrate that a Jewish background for the Epistle has superior explanatory power in the case of 1 John 2:2 and its role in the Epistle as a whole as compared to the current majority view. Superior explanatory power is the key argument for the replacement of the prevailing hypothesis with the intra-Jewish hypothesis. Though it is still the minority position about the identity of the Johannine opponents, variations of the intra-Jewish hypothesis have gained recent traction in contemporary scholarship.

In particular, this dissertation will represent an argument in favor of the hypothesis that the particular crisis within the Johannine community which 1 John addresses is a schism.

Members of the Johannine community who have recanted the confession that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah have produced this schism. In so doing, they have either formed a second community or returned to the non-Christian Jewish communities which they had left in favor of the Johannine Christian community. The overall argument of this dissertation, then, will weigh in in support of the particular hypothesis of Olsson,[15] amongst others.

This dissertation will reestablish 1 John 2:2 in its textual context. Because the distinction made in 1 John 2:2 is not seen to refer to any beliefs of the various communities identified by the proto-Gnostic hypothesis, interpreters have not read it in light of any particular background. They have read it in this way despite a partial parallel in 5:6 which, as a passage, describes the beliefs of the opponents in direct polemic. Without a background related to the overarching argument of the Epistle, 1 John 2:2 has seen its primary theological use within the debate regarding particular or limited atonement. This dissertation will establish a contextual reading for this passage within its immediate textual environs and the Epistle of the whole. This understanding has the side effect of removing the text from the particular atonement debate as irrelevant to the considerations involved.[16]

Because of its presumed irrelevance to the identity of the opponents addressed by the Epistle, 1 John 2:2 has not been read consistently against the proto-Gnostic hypothesis by holders of the majority opinion. This text has also not been read consistently against the

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[15] As set forth in *Letters*, xiv.

[16] This debate has involved 1 John 2:2 only in so far as an understanding of atonement has been important to the two references to atonement within 1 John from non-Johannine literature. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to assess the relative merits of various theories of atonement or to compare that of 1 John to those of other New Testament literature. This dissertation will argue for a particular view of atonement, in relation to the Day of Atonement, being utilized within the first epistle in relationship to its overall argument for the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. As this understanding of atonement is not mutually exclusive with other views, the establishment of its usage within the context of 1 John does not require the refutation of these other alternatives. Based on this understanding of atonement as here utilized by John, 1 John 2:2 does not provide data relevant to the discussion of particular atonement.

background of the intra-Jewish hypothesis by proponents of the variations of the minority position. The acontextual reading of 1 John 2:2 has become stereotyped and calcified through prolonged and widespread usage. By addressing this particular text afresh from the perspective of Christ as a high priest offering the sacrifice of atonement, this dissertation will offer an original approach to that text and the related theme of atonement in 1 John as a whole.

This dissertation will establish a pattern by which other portions of the text of 1 John can be interpreted against the Jewish background of the Epistle as a means of further strengthening the overall argument in its favor. In addition to a contextual reading of 1 John 2:2, the intra-Jewish hypothesis advanced here provides a background to the Epistle as a whole. This background, in turn, creates a framework for the interpretation and understanding of its sundry parts about both its background and its interpretation as a literary entity. The exegesis of texts other than 1 John 2:2 will both be facilitated by this background work and serve to strengthen even further the argument in support of the intra-Jewish hypothesis.

There are some avenues of further inquiry and suggestive connections which the argument here presented will generate, but which are tangential to the argument of this dissertation. The dissertation itself will not explore them. There are many other themes which wind through the text of 1 John for which a similar analysis against the hypothesized Jewish background of the Epistle is possible. Cain as the son of the devil is just one such example in which the author of 1 John utilizes traditions within Second Temple Jewish literature. These themes emerge against the background and structure demonstrated by this dissertation. However, these represent separate, though parallel, lines of inquiry to the argument of the dissertation.

This dissertation will discuss thematic connections between the First Epistle and John's Gospel so that arguments for the Jewish background of the Gospel text can form part of a

combined case for the intra-Jewish background of the Epistle. Issues of authorship, respective dates of composition, and literary dependence, particularly as these focus on the Gospel text, are beyond the scope of the dissertation. The text of John's Gospel and its background are only relevant and is discussed only as it bears upon the specific questions regarding the Epistle which are within the scope of the dissertation here described.

The close thematic ties between John's Gospel and 1 John, as this dissertation summarizes, also mean that the argument here presented for the intra-Jewish background of the conflict which the First Epistle addresses will represent a contribution to the argument for the Jewish background of John's Gospel. Wide consensus exists regarding the importance of understanding the Gospel's origins within Second Temple Judaism, far more than 1 John. The particular argument of the Epistle as understood against this Jewish background has relevance to understanding similar themes within the Gospel. This dissertation's argument regarding the theme of atonement in the Epistle will naturally have relevance to the related understanding of atonement in the Gospel.

The dissertation will not address the dating, composition, sources, or authorship of Lev 16. Nor will it address the understanding of Azazel at the time of the text's composition, which may or may not have originally represented a demonic figure. What is relevant to the argument of this dissertation is the understanding of the Day of Atonement and Azazel within the thought world of the composition of 1 John. Further, details of ritual practice outside of that referenced by 1 John, typological application of the Day of Atonement to Christ, and other elements of sacred space and the figure of Azazel which are not strictly relevant to 1 John 2:2 are not

relevant to this dissertation's argument.[17] All of these represent further avenues of inquiry to which the argument of this dissertation will represent a contribution, however. While the focus of this dissertation is necessarily narrow, its argument represents data for purposes of any of these topical discussions related to the Day of Atonement in its various aspects and the figure of Azazel.

Finally, this dissertation will represent a contribution to the growing literature regarding the understanding of atonement in Second Temple Judaism. This literature has focused on the particular themes of the purification of the material world and the defeat of malign spiritual powers. This understanding as developed from various Second Temple Jewish and early Christian texts is applied to a variety of New Testament texts, particularly regarding the nature of Christ's atoning sacrifice. This dissertation applies elements of this understanding of atonement in general and the Day of Atonement in particular to the theme of atonement as expressed in 1 John.

[17] This includes connections to other Johannine literature suggested in these texts, such as the fact that Azazel is bound hand and foot and cast into a dark pit in the earth until the day of judgment, as in 1 Enoch 10:4.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The currently prevailing hypothesis regarding the dispute within the community which occasioned 1 John is that there had come to be a set of beliefs described as proto-Gnostic. Gnosticism as such is a second century CE phenomenon. The proto-Gnostic hypothesis projects elements of Gnostic belief into the first century CE to serve as the theological viewpoint of the separatist faction in the background of 1 John. According to this proto-Gnostic hypothesis, the primary theological issues at stake relate to the physical, material nature of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ.[18] The hypothesis bases this identification on discerning the beliefs of the opponents of the author of 1 John through a process of "mirror-reading."[19] In this reading strategy, the positive statements of the author of 1 John are taken to be counterpoints to arguments or beliefs of his opponents.[20] The key passages identified as directed toward the opponents are 1 John 2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:6.

These beliefs are placed in parallel with the beliefs of known heretics of the early second century, typically the Docetists, opponents of Ignatius of Antioch, and later Cerinthian or

[18] Von Wahlde, *Judaisms*, 62–65.

[19] Cf. Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 16–18; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 15–16; John R.W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 44–47; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary* (Kent: Burns & Oates, 1992), 14–17; Marianne Meye Thompson, *1-3 John*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 15.

[20] This mode of reading is highly problematic for a number of reasons which will be further discussed in the dissertation proper.

Valentinian Gnosticism as reported by Irenaeus of Lyons,[21] to argue for identity based on perceived similarities.[22] In each of these instances, however, there are significant discontinuities between the historical communities as described by early Christian authors and the conjectural communities produced by "mirror-reading." The proto-Gnostic hypothesis, therefore, depends on the congruence of a generalized description of Gnostic Christology and a generalized provisional description of the opponents addressed by 1 John.

Over against this prevailing hypothesis, certain scholars offer others. Raymond Brown suggests another option: that 1 John addresses an intra-Johannine schism. Key to Brown's hypothesis is the Gospel of John's temporal priority to the Epistles.[23] A community already exists which has been formed, at least in large part, by John's Gospel. There is, therefore, a rightly labeled Johannine community. Brown rejects both the proto-Gnostic and docetic labels for the opponents of 1 John because in both cases the points of continuity between the reconstructed views of the opponents and those of Gnosticism or Docetism are matched by equally significant points of discontinuity.[24] Rather, Brown suggests that the split within the Johannine community, i.e., the community formed by John's Gospel, is a matter of differing interpretations of the Gospel text.[25] Jobes also takes a form of this hypothesis.[26]

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[21] These sources are also generally utilized in a "mirror-reading" fashion, adding a further level of conjecture.

[22] Cf. Kruse, *Letters*, 20–27; Marshall, *Epistles*, 19–22. Stott, *Letters*, 47–54; Schnackenburg, *Epistles*, 17–18; Thompson, *1-3 John*, 16–18.

[23] Brown, *Epistles*, 69–71.

[24] Brown, *Community*, 104–106.

[25] Brown, *Community*, 106–108.

[26] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 37.

This approach to the schism allows Brown to take into account a wide range of scholarship regarding the content of John's Gospel. Based upon its known use by early Gnostic sects and the interpretation of Rudolph Bultmann, Brown can conjecture a reading of John's Gospel with certain affinities to what would become later Gnosticism.[27] By positing this reading of the Gospel in the late first century CE, Brown reconstructs the identity of the secessionist party addressed by 1 John. The members of this secessionist party, under Brown's hypothesis, later merged into various Docetic and Gnostic groups.[28] This genealogical relationship accounts for both the continuities and discontinuities between the opponents of 1 John and the various known early Docetic and Gnostic sects.

Painter represents another minority view. He sees the opponents of 1 John as a group of recent Gentile additions to the community who have brought with them certain pagan conceptions, chiefly from mystery religions of the wider Greco-Roman world.[29] This identification represents another method for dealing with continuities and discontinuities between the apparent beliefs of the opponents of 1 John and known historical beliefs. Ultimately, however, Painter's approach is a comparison of two hypothetical communities. He constructs one of these hypothetical communities through "mirror-reading" of the "opponents" passages of 1 John. He bases the other on conjecture regarding a potential syncretism of early Christian and pagan beliefs. The latter community is not identifiable with any known historical community. While it seeks to solve the problem of identifying the opponents addressed by 1 John as such, this hypothetical reconstruction has little explanatory power for the interpretation of the Epistle.

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[27] Brown, *Epistles*, 80.

[28] Brown, *Epistles*, 104–106.

[29] John Painter, "The Opponents of 1 John," *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 48–49, 66–67.

By nature, the conjectural opponents shape themselves to whatever the Epistle is taken to say and therefore cannot shape the interpretation of 1 John.

Smalley takes a mixed view, combining the docetic hypothesis with a form of the intra-Jewish hypothesis which will be described below. Smalley argues for three factions within the Johannine community, that of the author, that of a group of Jewish believers who have either never fully accepted or moved away from the identification of Jesus as the Messiah, and a group of Gentile converts of a dualistic, docetic bent.[30] While this view attempts to cover all of the relevant data and integrate the strongest points of all of the hypotheses regarding the identity of the opponents of the First Epistle, there is no internal evidence in 1 John for multiple splinter sects within the Johannine community. Like Painter's hypothesized opponents, this view treats the problem of the identity of the opponents as an issue in isolation. By incorporating not only all of the data of 1 John but also all of the prominent hypotheses regarding the opponents, Smalley's view offers a comprehensive solution to that problem. It does not, however, provide explanatory or interpretive power regarding 1 John. Smalley's theory, by hypothesizing multiple groups to account for various data points, provides no reconstruction of any of these groups which could then be used to interpret the material argument of 1 John.

More recently, some scholars have suggested that the conflict is rather an intra-Jewish one. Specifically, they argue that a portion of the community had turned away from the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Jewish Messiah. Major scholarly proponents of this view include Birger Olsson and Judith Lieu. Olsson identifies the question as to whether Jesus is the Messiah or the Messiah is yet to come as the primary question addressed by the Epistle.[31] Lieu

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[30] Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentaries 51 (Waco: Word, 1984), xxiii–xxv.

[31] Olsson, *Letters*, xiii–xvi.

argues that the background of Hellenistic Judaism has explanatory power in understanding the argument of the Epistle.[32] Jensen makes a case for this approach based on treating "Jesus is the Christ" as the purpose statement of both John's Gospel and 1 John, subordinating other concerns to this central argument.[33]

The prevailing theory and even dissenting views outside of the intra-Jewish hypothesis see the opponents of 1 John as framed within the dynamic of schism and heresy. A group within the Johannine community has adopted views which the rest of the community regards as theologically unacceptable.[34] This heresy has led to the opponents' secession from the Johannine community to form another community. This new community is then identified with, or at least placed within an evolutionary chain leading to, a historical community with perceived theological similarities.

The intra-Jewish hypothesis, in contrast, views the conflict with the opponents in the background of 1 John in terms of apostasy.[35] This hypothesis conceives the Johannine community as a whole as Jewish in background. While this community may have included Gentile members, the community had assimilated these members into the Jewish community in such a way that they became enculturated to the community. One major sign of this enculturation is John's ability to frame argumentation from the Hebrew Scriptures with the expectation that those scriptures will be universally known and held to be authoritative within the community.[36]

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[32] Judith Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 20.

[33] Matthew D. Jensen, "'Jesus is the Christ': A New Paradigm for Understanding 1 John," *The Reformed Theological Review* 75 (2016): 1, 19–20.

[34] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 23–25.

[35] Olsson, *Letters*, xiv.

[36] Olsson, *Letters*, 256.

By recanting a previous confession of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the members of the Johannine community who constitute the opponents are returning to their former non-Christian Jewish community rather than forming a new community through secession.[37] This understanding that the move of the secessionists is apostasy rather than heresy, in turn, reshapes the understanding of the mode of argumentation within 1 John. The proto-Gnostic hypothesis categorizes John's argumentation as an assertion of correct doctrine over against perceived heresy. Brown's hypothesis envisions John's argumentation as the assertion of a correct interpretation of the text of John's Gospel over against an interpretation perceived as incorrect and even dangerous. The intra-Jewish hypothesis categorizes John's argumentation as elaborating the consequences in theology and practice of the rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.[38] The argumentation of 1 John outlines these consequences both against those who have recanted their testimony and to bolster the belief of the remaining community members.

This discussion is not completely separable from a similar discussion involving the Gospel of John. This connection is true of Brown's hypothesis in particular, which makes the dispute with the secessionists in the background of 1 John dependent upon the text of John's Gospel.[39] It is also true, however, of the other various hypotheses due to the connections between the text of the First Epistle and the Gospel. These connections are considered at the textual level and do not require the demonstration of a common author or a particular identity for that author. Likewise, though the particulars of some hypotheses, Brown's in particular, require a certain order of composition for the Gospel relative to 1 John, no order or timeline of composition is

[37] Olsson, *Letters*, 44.

[38] Olsson, *Letters*, 268–269.

[39] Brown, *Letters*, 32–35.

required. The textual relationships between epistle and Gospel represent data points requiring inclusion in any explanatory hypothesis.

There are some connections at a conceptual level between 1 John and the Gospel, and this has led many to argue for a shared background, including, recently, a shared Jewish background. Though he does not hold to an intra-Jewish background per se, Brown argues that not only do John's Gospel and the Johannine epistles stem from two phases of the life of a single community[40] but also that the latter represent an interpretation of the former.[41] Von Wahlde identifies three strands of then contemporary Judaism which lie behind both the Gospel of John and the Johannine epistles, these being canonical, apocalyptic, and Hellenistic Judaism.[42]

This identification has explanatory power beyond the identity of the opponents. While the diversity present in the Judaisms of the first century CE can adequately explain the "opponents" texts of 1 John (2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:6), it also provides a background against which the text and argument of 1 John can be read and interpreted. The relevance of this material is particularly strong in the case of the apocalyptic Jewish tradition, which stands in the background of several texts in 1 John as well as several major themes within John's Gospel.[43] Apocalyptic Judaism also stands behind the text of 1 John 2:2. Though it is not considered to be a text reflective of the beliefs of the opponents in 1 John, a Jewish background to the Epistle brings the understanding of atonement in the Judaisms of the first century CE to bear on the understanding of this text.

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[40] Brown, *Community*, 93–97.

[41] Brown, *Community*, 106–107.

[42] Von Wahlde, *Judaisms*, 105–107.

[43] Von Wahlde, *Judaisms*, 130–134.

In translating 1 John 2:2, at least since Martin Luther, it has been typical to supply the pronoun, usually translated "those of" in 1 John 2:2d. This emendation is not necessary and has been increasingly questioned as to its justification by more recent scholarship. Do argues affirmatively that 1 John 2:2d should be seen not in parallel with 2bc, but rather in parallel with 2a, specifically with the concept of ἱλασμός.[44] A survey of similar constructions to that of 2:2d in the New Testament likewise reveals that the addition of pronoun is not only not necessary or generally required. This addition is not desirable and creates difficulty in passages featuring similar constructions. The text, taken as written, bears affinities to concepts of atonement within first century CE Judaism. These affinities are a further argument against the emendation of the text for purposes of translation.

Additionally, there is a textual variant in 1 John 2:2c, as to whether the better reading is μόνον or μονών. The clear majority reading is μόνον, only three manuscripts represent the variant μονών. One of these three, however, is Codex B, giving μονών a priority beyond the manuscript count. The essential issue is whether the "only" in 1 John 2:2 is an adjective modifying των ήμετέρων, or an adverb. There is good reason to prefer the adverbial reading μόνον.[45] While the difference for interpretation between these two is minor, the adverbial reading is favorable to the understanding of 2:2d as connected to 2a.

First John 2:2 represents a statement within a larger argument. The nature of that argument and the place of this statement within it are interpreted against the hypothesized background context into which the text of 1 John is written. There is broad agreement that 1 John

[44] Do, "περὶ όλου τοῦ κόσμου?" 416.

[45] Toan Joseph Do, "Μόνον or μονῶν?: Reading 1 John 2:2c from the Editio Critica Maior," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133 (2014): 603–605, 623–624.

1:5–2:2 constitutes a literary sub-unit.[46] Scholars following this structural breakdown sometimes separate 1:5 as a sort of header to the succeeding unit 1:6–2:2. In these cases, they see 2:2 as the climax of an argument, generally focused on the concept of atonement. Other delimitations separate 1:5–10 and 2:1–6.[47] This understanding of the textual units is largely due to the repeated use of conditional clauses in 1:5–10 understood as a structuring element. The difficulty is that this separates the discussion of sin and atonement in 2:1–2 from the rhetorical question regarding sin in 1:10.

In addition to its place within the surrounding argument of 1 John, First John 2:2 also occupies a particular place within the structure of the Epistle as a whole. First John displays a structure according to a cyclical pattern, in which themes are introduced, expanded upon, and then concluded recursively. Interpreters describe this structure as "circular,"[48] or a "spiral,"[49] or an "inverted cone."[50] The difficulty of describing the structure of 1 John in a traditional outline has been a frequent subject of comment not only in recent scholarship[51] but also historically.[52]

This structure of 1 John serves to connect 1 John 2:2c to two other passages in 1 John. First John 5:19 is the only other place within the Epistle that the phrase, "the whole world" appears, placing it under the power of the evil one. The other reference to the figure of the devil occurs in 3:5–10, describing one of the two purposes of the coming of Christ as the destruction

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[46] Cf. Brown, *Epistles*, 118; Kruse, *Letters*, 61; Marshall, *Epistles*, 22–26; Olsson, *Letters*, 88–90; Stott, *Letters*, 59. Thompson, *1-3 John*, 31.

[47] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 39–40; Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 52, 70.

[48] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 38.

[49] Marshall, *Epistles*, 22; Kruse, *Letters*, 31.

[50] Lenski, *Interpretation*, 366–367.

[51] Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 21.

[52] Brown, *Epistles*, 116–118.

of "the works of the evil one." The other reference to atonement in 1 John occurs in 4:10, which connects the theme of love in the Epistle to the theme of atonement as expressed in 1 John 2:2. Further, it presents love as the motivation for the high priestly work of Christ as described in 1 John 2.

Based on an intra-Jewish background for 1 John, the use of ἱλασμός in 1 John 2:2 refers not to an abstract concept of atonement, but the Day of Atonement as understood in the first century CE.[53] Importantly, this makes early Jewish material regarding the concept of atonement more relevant than Greek lexical data or usage of atonement language outside of the context of the Jewish scriptures. Olsson argues for this connection based on how the mediatorial role of Christ in 1 John 2:1 reflect purification from sin and intercession by the high priest in the Day of Atonement ritual practice.[54] Brown likewise argues that 1 John 2:2 is an explicit reference to the Day of Atonement.[55] Kruse sees a possible connection to the Day of Atonement in the preceding 1:9 and its mention of the confession of sin.[56]

The Day of Atonement ritual contained two elements, the purification of the sanctuary and the surrounding camp, and the committing of the people's sin to Azazel in the wilderness for destruction. First John utilizes this cleansing metaphor throughout regarding the purification from sin brought about through Christ's atonement. The Greek word ἱλασμός is typically used to translate the Hebrew root כפר, including in the title "Day of Atonement."[57] This root appears to

[53] Olsson, *Letters*, 302.

[54] Olsson, *Letters*, 302.

[55] Brown, *Epistles*, 217.

[56] Kruse, *Letters*, 68.

[57] Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 78.

be related to an Akkadian cognate meaning "to wipe" and is used parallel to verbs of cleansing and purification.[58] This language is paralleled in 1 John 1:9, 3: 3, and 3:5.

This cleansing or purification is not conceived of in a purely metaphorical sense as in the cleansing of conscience. Rather, the purification of the sanctuary and camp enacted in the Day of Atonement ritual represents the removal of a metaphysical taint. This residue of the pollution of sin contaminates physical space and its contents.[59] Within the Day of Atonement ritual proper, the most important sacred space is the sanctuary itself. The contamination threatens the continued presence of God within the sanctuary. Beyond the sanctuary, the camp in the wilderness and later the city and land and their content required cleansing. First John 2:2 extends the space of this purification to encompass the whole world as physical space and its contents, i.e., the entire created order.[60]

This residual taint or stain of sin, conceived as a metaphysical reality, is separable from sin itself. While the sin itself inheres in the person who commits that sin, the resulting taint gravitates from the location of its commission to the sanctuary.[61] It is for this reason that the sanctuary itself is the location of the cleansing with blood. This stain taints the ground itself of the land or the camp. Wherever any of God's people sin, this corruption comes into being, and it gravitates toward their camp or land in general, and the sanctuary at its heart in particular.[62]

In the sanctuary it represents particular jeopardy as it holds the potential of driving away the presence of Israel's God on the one hand or provoking his wrath to break forth in the camp

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[58] J.H. Hayes, "Atonement in the Book of Leviticus," *Interpretation*, 52 (1998): 8–9.

[59] Roy Gane, *Cult and Character* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 163–166.

[60] Roy Gane, *Cult and Character*, 144.

[61] Roy Gane, *Cult and Character*, 144.

[62] Hayes, "Atonement," 6.

on the other.[63] First John 2:2d extends this element of atoning sacrifice in the case of that offered by Christ to the whole world. In addition to atoning for the sins of his believing people, Christ removes the stain and corruption of sin from the entire world and all of its contents. This reading of 1 John 2:2 represents an apocalyptic understanding of atonement. The ultimate end of this atonement is the purification of the whole world to allow God to dwell in all of it with his people.

First John speaks of the second element of Christ's atonement as the destruction of the works of the devil (3:8), under whose power the whole world lies (5:19). Within Second Temple Judaism, Azazel had come to be seen as a devil figure. Initially, the figure of Azazel was associated with the one who accused Israel of its sins and campaigned against forgiveness.[64] By the 1st century BCE, Azazel had become a devil figure or angel responsible for the world's evil, as witnessed by 1 Enoch 10:8, "The whole earth has been corrupted through the works taught by Azazel, to him ascribe all sin." Brown brings together these themes with the language of 1 John 2:7-10, and that of 1QS3:17-22,

> The generation of truth spring from a fountain of light, but the generation of iniquity from a source of darkness. All the sons of righteousness are under the rule of the prince of light and walk in the ways of light, but all the sons of iniquity are under the rule of the angel of darkness and walk in the ways of darkness. The angel of darkness deceives all the sons of righteousness; all their sins are caused…by his dominion.[65]

The role and characterization of the devil or evil one in 1 John is parallel to the understanding of Azazel within apocalyptic Judaism, further connecting John's understanding of the atonement with the Day of Atonement ritual proper.

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[63] Hayes, "Atonement," 6.

[64] Sidney B. Hoenig, "New Qumran Pesher on Azazel," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 56 (1966): 250–251.

[65] Brown, *Epistles*, 242–244.

The corruption of the physical world occurs through the works of this malign spiritual power, but he performs these works through human agents. Within early Jewish and Christian interpretation, the first and chief of these agents is Cain. Byron has compiled and detailed a vast swathe of this ancient commentary on the person of Cain and his crimes.[66] This corruption was continued and accelerated within the lives of Cain's descendants as described in his genealogy. Byron has also commented at length specifically on the use of Cain as an example in 1 John 3.[67] Byron focuses on the underlying themes in 1 John 3's reference to Cain of ritual impurity and sacrifice.

The ritual envisions Azazel as the spiritual power in control of the area outside of that purified by ritual cleansing. In the context of Lev 16, this was the wilderness outside the camp.[68] In the context of later practice of the ritual, this was the area of the world outside of Judea, under Gentile control. While the high priest used the blood of one goat for the wiping away and cleansing of the stain of sin, the other goat bore away the sins of the people to Azazel in the region of his control. This both returned sin to the realm of sin and removed sin itself, not merely its taint and pollution, from the precincts of sacred and dedicated space.

Within the ritual context of the Day of Atonement, one of the two goats was chosen by lot to be a goat for Azazel. This goat was not offered as a sacrifice or slain in the ritual proper, though in later practice, including that of the Second Temple period, the goat was often followed into the wilderness and pushed from a cliff or rocky crag to ensure its death so that it would not

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[66] John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry*, Leiden: Brill, 2011.

[67] John Byron, "Slaughter, Fratricide and Sacrilege: Cain and Abel Traditions in 1 John 3," *Biblica* 88 (2007): 526–535.

[68] B. Janowski, "Azazel," In *Dictionary of Demons and Deities in the Bible*, 2nd ed., Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 128–131.

return.[69] Once the sins of the people had been laid upon the goat, it was rendered unclean and could not serve as a sacrifice, least of all to atone for the sin which it already bore.

Rather, the goat's fate represents another possible fate of the people as a result of their sin, that of exile. The transferal of the sins of the people to the scapegoat removes the sins from the people and the camp.[70] By being given over to Azazel, the goat is abandoned by God and consigned to the sinful powers in control of the world outside of the realm of God's action. The control of the spiritual powers represented by Azazel over the remainder of the world was itself based upon sin.[71] The sins of the people, therefore, gave these spiritual powers a potential claim over them. The taking away of the sins by the goat resolves this claim.

First John 2:2 then serves to introduce the concept that Christ's atonement is twofold, each element of which the text of the Epistle will then expand upon within the Epistle. The atonement of Christ cleanses the believer of sin and destroys the power of the evil one over the world. To reject Jesus as the Christ then removes one from the realm of purification from sin and returns one to the world and authority of the evil one to face destruction.[72] This conception of atonement and its effects is directly tied to the theme and argument of the Epistle as a whole in serving as a characterization of the consequence of the recantation of the opponents' identification of Jesus as Christ. This argument allows the text to also serve as a warning text to the current members of the community to discourage any further apostasy.

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[69] This ensuring of the death of the scapegoat is prescribed in the Mishnah at Yomah 6:6 and alluded to in the fate of Azazel himself in both 1 Enoch and the Apocalypse of Abraham. Barnabas, on the other hand, does not describe the death of the goat but rather its being abandoned after being tied to a thorn bush that is just beginning to bud (Bar 6:9).

[70] Ithamar Gruenwald, "Sacrifices in Biblical Literature and Ritual Theory," *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 4 (2001): 30–31.

[71] Gane, *Cult*, 234.

[72] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 342.

The intra-Jewish hypothesis regarding the background and context of 1 John better interprets 1 John 2:2 itself, and also better explains the relationship between John's statements regarding atonement and the argument of the Epistle as a whole. Competing hypotheses answer questions raised by a select set of texts which can be seen to refer directly to the beliefs of John's opponents.[73] These other hypotheses do not, however, directly bear upon the interpretation of 1 John 2:2. This fact means that they are unable to integrate the teaching of this and related texts to the argument of those "opponents" passages to give a coherent account of the overall argument against the opponents or in support of the Johannine community proper. This weakness in the competing hypotheses then supports the conclusion that the intra-Jewish hypothesis has superior explanatory power not only regarding 1 John 2:2, but the Epistle as a whole.

[73] Olsson, *Letters*, 264–268.

III. THE JEWISH BACKGROUND OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

An epistle is by its nature an occasional document.[74] The character of the initial audience, as well as the situation which the Epistle addresses, are therefore of paramount importance in the interpretation of 1 John.[75] To this end, interpreters have offered a series of hypotheses regarding the nature of the community which received John's first epistle and the nature of the conflict within that community which 1 John was intended to resolve. These hypotheses are typically framed in terms of "the opponents," those recently departed from the recipient community whom John opposes and seeks to correct through the Epistle's argument.[76]

That there is such a group of opponents is made clear by the text itself. These are persons who seek to deceive the community (1 John 2:26; 3:7). They are referred to by John as "false prophets" (4:1) and "antichrists" (2:18).[77] These persons were once members of the community, but have now initiated a schism within the community, and separated themselves from it (2:19;

[74] 1 John lacks most of the typical traits of epistolary literature from the first century CE. Some of these deviations will be argued to be deliberate due to an intertextual relationship with John's Gospel. While 1 John may not meet the general standards of the epistolary genre, it is a text which clearly circulated as a letter. Further, it is consistently grouped in the manuscript evidence with 2 and 3 John. The latter of which in particular so matches the standard form of ancient epistolary literature that it might be considered generic. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 86–92; Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 4–6; John Painter, 1, 2, and 3 John (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 37–48; George Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 3.

[75] Unlike the Pauline Epistles, 1 John lacks an addressee. There is clearly a community in view, but whether that community is located within a particular city or a group of nearby cities is indeterminate. This makes the internal evidence of the text paramount, though certain approaches will attempt to bring various external evidences to bear.

[76] Matthew D. Jensen, *Affirming the Resurrection of the Incarnate Christ: A Reading of 1 John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

[77] Streett, *Opponents,* 1.

4:1).[78] These direct mentions of the opposing party throughout the text of 1 John serve to frame the argument of the Epistle as a whole as a response to that party. First John, therefore, represents one side of a discussion. The interpretation of that discourse requires an understanding of the other side of the discussion and the community in which it is taking place.[79]

Determination of the makeup of the recipient community and the particular problem within that community which occasioned the writing of 1 John functions interpretively in two ways. First, positively, it reveals the real context of theological statements made by John. The individual statements and overall argument of 1 John are not abstract but are made about real difficulties, internal and external, encountered by the community. This fact opens interpretive possibilities in the application of John's understanding of Christ to the communal life of believers. Second, at the same time, the nature of the community and John's opponents close off certain other interpretive possibilities. A hypothesis regarding the nature of John's argument must pass the test of representing a realistic view of the community and the opponents which it addresses. If such a hypothesis presupposes the existence of a community or opponents which could not have reasonably existed at the time of composition, for example, due to anachronism, then that hypothesis must be rejected.[80]

The primary means of assessing the validity of the various hypotheses regarding the community setting of 1 John and the identity of the opponents is their explanatory power. The

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[78] Jensen, *Affirming*, 8.

[79] There are, however, scholars who have begun to argue that this task is ultimately impossible and, therefore, 1 John should be read non-polemically, Schmid being a notable proponent. Even Schmid, however, is unable to interpret the text of 1 John in a vacuum and must at times make at least broad characterizations of the background and preceding knowledge of 1 John's original recipient community. Suffice it to say that all historical reconstructions are provisional and the more specific they become the more suspect.

[80] Streett, *Opponents*, 90.

text of 1 John itself constitutes a set of data which a given hypothesis seeks to interpret and explain. Interpreters who advance any external evidence in addition to the internal evidence of 1 John's text in support of their hypothesis must then justify it as necessary and directly related to the internal evidence of the text itself. A hypothesis will succeed or fail through an evaluation of its ability to explain all of the data in a cohesive and meaningful way.

Interpreters have advanced several hypotheses regarding the identity of John's opponents and the nature of the situation in the community which he seeks to address in 1 John.[81] The hypothesis which currently prevails in scholarship posits that there are teachers who have begotten a faction within the community which holds to beliefs similar to what will later become known as Gnosticism in the latter part of the second century CE. The beliefs of such a faction include and the hypothesis sometimes focus upon a docetic Christology. In addition to this currently prevailing hypothesis, some minority positions have been advanced. The most influential of these was put forward by Raymond E. Brown. In recent years, some scholars have advanced hypotheses which see the conflict addressed by 1 John as an intra-Jewish dispute. Though there are variations in detail among specific hypotheses which would generally fall under this category, the Jewish background proposed for the community and the opponents has superior explanatory power about the text of 1 John over against other hypotheses so far advanced.

As further evidence for the intra-Jewish background of 1 John, some significant verbal and thematic connections exist between 1 John and John's Gospel. These similarities and related ideas constitute a significant argument for the similarity of background and community context between the Gospel and the Epistle. Noting these connections and how they strengthen or

[81] Streett, *Opponents*, 5–6.

weaken a given hypothesis regarding the background of 1 John does not require identity of author or community. It requires only a similar *Sitz im Leben*, which is made reasonable by the already noted connections between the texts.

A. The Docetism Hypothesis

First John proposes as a central test of correct faith the confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). This statement has long been hypothesized to represent opposition to a docetic Christology, emphasizing this confession on "the flesh."[82] The identification of a docetic Christology on the part of the secessionists would then indicate that John's concern in this text is to emphasize the materiality of the incarnation.[83] The opponents would have been preaching a divine Christ who had appeared among men but had not truly become man.[84] Such a Christology existed at the end of the first and the beginning of the second century CE, as evidenced by Ignatius of Antioch[85] and Polycarp[86] writing against it. It is therefore not impossible that such a Christology could have been the proclamation of John's opponents in the Epistle.

There would appear to be an ethical dimension to the teaching of the opponents as well, as 1 John goes to great lengths to establish that a lack of love for the brother is sin and

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[82] D. Moody Smith sees the identification of 1 John's opponents as holding a docetic Christology as "at least a predominant point of view, if not a complete consensus." D. Moody Smith, *First, Second, and Third John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 131–132. Other significant proponents of the opponents docetic Christology include Braun, Bultmann, Holtzmann, Schnackenburg, Schnelle, Strecker, and Vorster.

[83] The prologue of 1 John, in particular 1:1, is here taken to be focused on tangibility, rather than on the eyewitness nature of the author's testimony.

[84] L. Daniel Camtey Jr., *1 John: On Docetism and Resurrection* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 1–2.

[85] Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* 1.1–2; 7.1.

[86] Polycarp, *Epistle to the Phillipians*. 7.

lawlessness (3:4–11). It appears from the same sources regarding docetic teaching in this early period that there was a lack of concern exhibited by those holding it for social concerns of poverty and oppression.[87] It is reasonable to construe that a lack of belief in the physical reality of Christ led to a related lack of concern for the physical world and physical well-being. John's argument that knowing Christ requires living a life in the body in parallel with his (2:4–6) would then be countering this tendency toward an otherworldly view of ethical priorities.[88]

Proponents of the hypothesis that the opponents held a docetic Christology also point to the apparent rejection by Docetism of the Eucharist.[89] Because there was no flesh and blood proper to the divine Christ, participation in the Eucharist was irrelevant to the knowledge of Christ. First John 5:5–8 are understood by those advancing this view to refer to the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.[90] John is arguing that the body and blood of Christ within the Eucharist are a testimony to the reality of the incarnation. The docetic opponents, then, are rejecting this testimony which ultimately is testimony from God himself concerning the Son (5:9–10). This argument is a particular point of weakness in this form of the hypothesis, as there is no explicit mention here of the sacraments, nor is there any such mention anywhere in 1 John. Further, whether there is a significant emphasis on the sacraments in Johannine literature broadly considered is widely questioned.[91]

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[87] Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* 6.2

[88] The relationship between the ethical and christological arguments of 1 John is a persistent problem. This includes the question of whether or not the ethical imperatives bear any relationship to the opponents whatsoever. Jensen, *Affirming*, 8–9.

[89] Ignatius, *Smyrnaeans* 5.1–3; 6.1–7.1; *Trallians* 9.1–2.

[90] This view became particularly popular with many of the fourth and fifth century church fathers, who saw the liturgical and sacramental life of the church as the primary testimony in the world to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Ambrose, Augustine, and John Chrysostom all made eucharistic application of the blood motif.

[91] Bultmann, for example, argued that John's Gospel was actually anti-sacramental. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Tr. by G.R. Beasley-Murray, Gen. ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 485–86.

While there are identifiable points of contact between Docetism as described by Ignatius and the teaching of the opponents in 1 John, there are also considerable points of discontinuity. Docetism as such, as described by Ignatius, did not have a place for a human Jesus. Rejection of Christ's humanity, however, makes little sense of 2:22 which identifies the opponents as those who deny that Jesus is the Christ. According to the docetic Christology, the person of Jesus Christ is definitionally not a flesh and blood human.[92] Rather, he is a theophanic appearance, such as the angel of the Lord in the Hebrew Scriptures. While there seems to be a reticence by the opponents to embrace the flesh and blood of Jesus in some sense, there is nothing in 1 John to suggest docetic teaching positively.

In countering Docetism, Ignatius goes to great pains to reinforce and further define the authority of human church leadership. The only leaders identified in the text of 1 John are the leaders of the opponents, and this in a negative sense. Authority in 1 John is given to the witness of the Spirit, not to any person other than Christ to whom the opponents are called to submit.[93] If the intent of 1 John is to combat the Docetic movement, it neglects key known elements of docetic teaching. Because the opponents of 1 John represent a faction in schism, their relationship to community leadership would seem to be germaine.

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[92] There is some disagreement regarding the precise definition of Docetism with regard to Christology. Docetism proper as defined by Ignatius is an essentially monophysite Christology, rendering the person of Jesus merely an appearance of the divine nature. Subsequent writers, however, begin to use the term "Docetism" as a label for any Christology which they see as deviant regarding the incarnation in order to conjoin it to heresy. Minimally, to be rightly considered Docetism, a view must deny that the divine Christ became simultaneously fully human. Michael Slusser, "Docetism: A Historical Definition," *The Second Century* 1 (1981): 168.

[93] Pheme Perkins, "Koinōnia in 1 John 1:3–7: The Social Context of Division in the Johannine Letters," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 638.

B. The Prevailing Hypothesis: Proto-Gnosticism

The proto-Gnosticism hypothesis is the currently prevailing hypothesis regarding the identity of the opponents of 1 John in various forms.[94] It takes more of the text of the Epistle into account, seeing the opponents as proponents of an early form of what will come to be categorized broadly as Gnosticism. Irenaeus of Lyons, writing ca. 180 CE did not firmly distinguish between Docetism and Gnosticism as two separate movements or sects but considered the former to be a subset or characteristic belief of the latter.[95] Much of the argument of 1 John does not address the idea of an immaterial Christ as such. Some have suggested that different elements of the Epistle reflect several different varieties of opponents within the community addressed in 1 John. This hypothesis of multiple opponent groups, however, is belied by the recursive way in which 1 John develops its argument and the repetitions which characterize that argument as it moves forward.[96]

Proponents, therefore, advance that the confession that Jesus Christ came in the flesh must be understood in relation to the preceding confession that Jesus is the Christ (2:22). The problematic teaching of the opponents, then, is not that Jesus Christ was an immaterial phantasm, but that the person of Jesus of Nazareth and the divine Christ are not identical.[97] In this

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[94] Significant proponents of the proto-Gnostic hypothesis, arguing that the opponents are either early Gnostics, "gnosticizing Christians," or a group which eventually evolved into a Gnostic sect include Bultmann, Dodd, Hauck, Holtzmann, Kummel, Law, Moffatt, Plummer, Schlatter, Songer, and Wilder. It was, in general, the approach of the "history of religions" school.

[95] This means that there is considerably overlap in individual hypotheses regarding the opponents of 1 John between scholars emphasizing a docetic Christology and those proposing a form of proto-Gnosticism as the opponents' viewpoint.

[96] Jensen, *Affirming*, 17–19.

[97] This is sometimes referred to as a "separation Christology." Streett, *Opponents*, 176–177.

conception, Christ is still an immaterial divine being, not subject to suffering or death and not possessing flesh and blood. Those who held this view of the Christ as distinct from the human person Jesus likewise seem to have had little use for the sacraments, though proponents of this form of the hypothesis tend to interpret 1 John 5:6 as referring to the baptism of Jesus by John and human death of Jesus rather than to sacramental witness.[98]

Advancers of this interpretation cite an early textual variant in 1 John 4:3 in favor of its antiquity and authority.[99] Several early citations and a few later manuscripts replace "which does not confess" in contrast with 4:2's confession of Christ having come in the flesh with the verb "which looses."[100] This reading is understood not to mean the spirit which abolishes Jesus, but the spirit which "looses" or separates Jesus from the Christ. While the Vulgate follows this reading, the earliest testimony to it come from Irenaeus.[101] Irenaeus' usage means that it comes within the context of anti-Gnostic apologetic. It occurs after that almost entirely in the West. This context for its usage argues strongly that the reading in question is a gloss on 4:3 aimed at forms of Gnosticism which do indeed separate a human Jesus from a divine Christ.[102] That this was a later application of the text does not, however, constitute evidence that it was the original argument of the text, even if the later application is considered to be perfectly valid. That the opponents of 1 John and the later Gnostics both denied that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh

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[98] See, for example, Bultmann, *Epistles*, 80.

[99] Scholars favoring this reading include Brown, *Epistles*, 494–496; Bultmann, *Epistles*, 62; Von Wahlde, *Commandments*, 159. Schnackenburg goes so far as to argue definitively that the variant is the original text. Schnackenburg, *Epistles*, 201.

[100] NA28 reads "καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν· καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου ὃ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν ἤδη." The variant changes the first clause to "καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ λύει τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν."

[101] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.16.8.

[102] Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament,* 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 644–645.

does not in any way imply that they did so in the same manner. Likewise, it does not imply that their teachings were identical or even genealogically related.

The other key text which serves as internal evidence in advancing the proto-Gnostic hypothesis is 1 John 4:2. The Spirit of God is that spirit which "confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh." Proponents of this hypothesis closely relate this text to 5:6, in that both speak to the coming of Jesus Christ and both are taken by the proto-Gnostic hypothesis to speak to the unity of Christ in the incarnation and the reality of Christ's suffering, thereby opposing the position of the separatist party. This interpretation takes flesh and blood as characteristics of Christ's person. However, where Christ is said to have come or appeared in 1 John, and the meaning of the verb is unambiguous, it points not to the mode of the incarnation, but rather to Christ's purpose (1 John 3:5, 8; 5:20).[103] Further, these purposes are all related to the atoning work of Christ (2:1–2; 4:10). It is more in keeping with the argument of the Epistle to see 4:2 and 5:6, then, as speaking to the flesh and blood of Christ in relationship to his person and work in coming into the world.[104] This identification serves to connect these texts to the moral portions of the argument, through walking in the way of Christ.

That the separatist faction addressed by 1 John later evolved into a Gnostic sect is the strongest connection which can be argued between the opponents of 1 John and later Gnosticism as the latter is a phenomenon of the later second century CE.[105] For this reason, proponents of this hypothesis generally characterize the opponents of 1 John as proto-Gnostics or semi-Gnostics.[106]

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[103] Von Wahlde, *Judaisms*, 79.

[104] Von Wahlde, *Judaisms*, 91–92.

[105] Jensen, *Affirming*, 17.

[106] Jensen, *Affirming*, 17. The "proto-Gnostic" designation itself is utterly nebulous, and therefore impossible to assess by any standard means. A hypothetical early developmental stage of Gnosticism can take on whatever traits are needed to support a theory but will then have no explanatory value.

In this conception, the opponents would represent an early instance of some of the ideas which would later come to comprise Gnosticism in its various more developed religious and ritual systems. John's characterization of these opponents as drawing disciples after themselves and of separating from the community as a faction would argue to the contrary. These false prophets had teachings at least as coherent as that which had been formative to the community such that it could function as a rival. A group of nebulous ideas might cause confusion or dissension, but not necessarily faction or schism.

1. Cerinthianism

To bridge the historical gap between the opponents of 1 John and later Gnosticism, those who advance the proto-Gnostic hypothesis point to the person of Cerinthus.[107] Cerinthus is known to history as the founder of a Gnostic sect through both Irenaeus and Epiphanius. An anecdote related by Irenaeus which he identifies as being related to him by Polycarp serves to connect Cerinthus to the person of John. In this anecdote, John fled from a public bath upon learning that Cerinthus was present there.[108] According to both of these writers against heresy who discuss his theological positions, Cerinthus taught that the divine Christ descended upon the human person of Jesus of Nazareth at his baptism and departed from him before the crucifixion.[109] The human Jesus then died and rose while the Christ remained untouched by suffering and death.

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[107] Scholars advancing a connection between the theology of Cerinthus and the opponents of 1 John include Bogart, Brooke, Carson, Hengel, Kinlaw, Law, Marshall, Stott, Westcott, Yarbrough, and Zahn.

[108] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.3.4.

[109] Jensen, *Affirming*, 14.

Cerinthianism fits the conception of proto-Gnosticism advanced in this hypothesis in further ways beyond separating a divine Christ from a human Jesus.[110] First John 5:6 is taken to be a further refutation of Cerinthus' view in arguing that Jesus Christ came not only through water, i.e., his baptism, but through water and blood, i.e., his suffering and death.[111] The union of name and title here, "Jesus Christ" and in 4:2 are taken to be statements that Jesus Christ is a single person throughout his life.[112] According to this view, then, the central element of the controversy between John and his opponents surrounds orthodox Christology, that the human Jesus and the divine Son or Christ are the same person, over against a view which sees them as related, but not identical.[113]

The ethical element of John's teaching would then represent a counter-argument to the ethical teaching of the opponents which would flow from such a Christology. Within Cerinthus' conception of the divine Christ operating through a human Jesus, the primary purpose of the coming of Christ is revelatory.[114] The divine Christ descends to make known the otherwise unknowable Father, the creator God. Salvation, then, takes the form of noetic enlightenment divorced from the ethics or morality of behavior. John's arguments that being enlightened and possessing the knowledge of God entail love for the brother, doing righteousness, and walking as Christ walked (cf. 2:4–6, 9; 2:29–3:10) are taken to be countering this view of salvation by elevated *gnosis*.

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[110] Streett, *Opponents*, 53–54.

[111] Jensen, *Affirming*, 14.

[112] Streett, *Opponents*, 55.

[113] B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), xliv.

[114] Marshall, *Epistles*, 20.

The historical connection to Cerinthus is tenuous at best. The utilization of his beliefs as recorded by later authors as an interpretive tool for understanding 1 John must make several assumptions. It must assume that the anecdote related second hand by Irenaeus is historically accurate.[115] Further, this anecdote establishes only that John had some familiarity with the teachings of Cerinthus, not that Cerinthus or his followers had ever been members of the Johannine community or had induced a schism. It must assume that the John about whom the anecdote is true is the author of 1 John. There is no direct evidence of a connection between Cerinthus and the community to which 1 John is written or the situation which the Epistle addresses.[116] This connection also assumes that Irenaeus represents the teaching of Cerinthus accurately in an objective way, not skewing it to make it of a piece with his other Gnostic opponents.[117] The testimony of Epiphanius is even more problematic, as he appears to speak of two different individuals named Cerinthus, and so it must be assumed that the Cerinthus whom he describes in ways similar to Irenaeus's description is the same Cerinthus for his testimony to have any bearing.[118]

While there are general parallels between elements of what was taught by Cerinthus as described by Irenaeus and Epiphanius and what may be deduced based on the argument of 1 John, there are also several points of discontinuity. Even making the assumptions described above, Cerinthus is said to have taught that the Father of the Son was a distinct, inferior creator god from the ultimate most high God.[119] He likewise is said to have differentiated between the

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[115] For problems with Irenaeus's reliability on this and related points, see Streett, *Opponents*, 69–71.

[116] Jensen, *Affirming*, 14.

[117] Jensen, *Affirming*, 13.

[118] Streett, *Opponents*, 63–64.

[119] Jensen, *Affirming*, 14.

Son and Christ. None of these distinctions are evidenced in any way in 1 John. Likewise, the rest of what the sources describe as Cerinthus' well-elaborated system of aeons and other spiritual powers are nowhere in evidence.[120] The sources do not describe the basis of Cerinthus' teaching as coming to know the Father, but rather as knowledge of an intricate cosmology and the means of navigating it to find salvation.

Additionally, there are several elements of the argument of 1 John which are at best only inferred to relate to teachings of Cerinthus, as there is no evidence of Cerinthus having taught similar beliefs. While Cerinthus is reported to have taught that the Christ in descending had brought knowledge of the creator God, he is nowhere said to have taught that he received private personal revelations or functioned as a prophet in the way in which 1 John describes the opponents. Though the sources do not describe him and his followers as following traditional Judeo-Christian morality, they are nowhere said to have claimed themselves to be sinless or righteous according to the law.[121] If 1 John were directed against Cerinthus and his followers, the greater body of its moral teaching regarding purification of sin and atonement would be profoundly misdirected.

Because of these factors, Cerinthus cannot be considered a good candidate to bring Gnostic teaching backward through time into the Johannine community. Proponents of the proto-Gnostic hypothesis have typically moved from identifying the opponents of 1 John with Cerinthus and his followers to arguing that Cerinthus and his teaching represent a middle stage of development between the opponents of 1 John and later Gnostic sects.[122] This proposed

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[120] Jensen, *Affirming*, 14.

[121] Marshall, *Epistles*, 18.

[122] Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 17.

genealogical relationship, however, amounts to making a series of conjectures regarding the opponents of 1 John without historical grounding in any known theological movement. There is, in fact, no known theological movement or sect known to have existed in the first or second century CE which precisely matches what could be reasonably inferred from 1 John.[123] Without a historical tether of some sort, this process of "mirror-reading" can produce any number of results, as few commentators even agree on which statements within the Epistle should be taken as direct counters to the opponents' teaching, as opposed to those which serve to further the overall argument.[124]

The proto-Gnostic hypothesis is grounded in a particular reading of its key passages, from which its proponents deduce the beliefs of the opponents. As the external evidence of early Christian writers regarding Gnosticism and Docetism cannot be seen to correlate to the position of John's opponents directly, only internal evidence remains. The first of these texts is 1 John 2:22. The simple reading of the Greek as it stands, ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ χριστός, is that it refers to "the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ." That this verse must be taken in the context of significantly later verses in the text,[125] and therefore must refer to a theological construct which separates the man Jesus from a divine Christ would seem to be special pleading. Minimally, there should be a compelling reason brought to bear which disqualifies the plain meaning.[126] The interpretation required by the proto-Gnostic hypothesis cannot be clearly shown

[123] Schnackenburg concluded that, "The heresy which occasions 1 and 2 John cannot be parallel with any other manifestation of heresy known from that era." Schnackenburg, *Epistles*, 23.

[124] Hansjörg Schmid, "How to Read the First Epistle of John Non-Polemically," *Biblica* 85 (2004): 25.

[125] It is generally interpreted through the proto-Gnostic interpretation of 4:2 and 5:6, as by Thompson, *1-3 John*, 79–80.

[126] Streett, *Opponents*, 90.

to derive from the text itself internally, proponents must import it from an external source which has been demonstrated to not apply to the particular case of 1 John's opponents.

The proto-Gnostic hypothesis, then, is not satisfactory whether it posits Cerinthianism, Gnosticism or a more general Docetism as the ideology of John's opponents. These theories are unable to support themselves based on external evidence, as no externally known Christian heresy of the first two centuries CE can be shown to be equivalent to the position of the opponents in 1 John.[127] Further, the variations of this hypothesis are unable to explain the internal evidence of the Epistle in its totality. Finally, in the case of the internal texts which proponents advance as key supports of the hypothesis, the proto-Gnostic background of these texts cannot be put forward as a necessary inference from the text itself. Ultimately, this hypothesis is inadequate to the task of interpreting 1 John.

C. Raymond E. Brown's Hypothesis

Raymond E. Brown has elaborated a hypothesis[128] regarding the community situation addressed by 1 John and the identity of the opponents which has proved widely influential even among those who have not adopted his theory wholesale.[129] Key to Brown's hypothesis is the direct connections between John's Gospel and 1 John. Brown argues that both of these texts address the same community. First John, in particular, is addressed to the community in a period after the

[127] Jensen, "Jesus is the Christ," 1.

[128] His particular reading of 1 John is developed in his commentary. Brown, *Epistles,* 69–115. He further develops his conception of the Johannine community in Brown, *Community*, 93–144.

[129] Variations of Brown's hypothesis are supported by scholars such as Klauck, Von Wahlde, Perkins, Painter, and Burge.

reception of the text of John's Gospel.[130] This chronology establishes two important elements of the background. First, both John and 1 John reflect the life of a single community, which makes the data of the text of John's Gospel relevant to establishing his hypothesis. Second, the content of John's Gospel constitutes, at least in part, the theological worldview and categories of thought of the community receiving 1 John. As 1 John describes the opponents as having been at one point members of the community, this applies to them as well.[131]

The core of Brown's hypothesis is that 1 John was written to address a schism within the Johannine community. This schism, in Brown's argument, was based in different interpretations of material in John's Gospel.[132] The opponents, then, are the leaders of the faction opposite the author of 1 John. The purpose of 1 John is, under this hypothesis, to support and shore up the remaining members of the original Johannine community in their belief while countering any remaining influence of the faction which had departed. Because Brown grounds the dispute in the text of John's Gospel, he maintains that the dispute must be legitimate.[133] It cannot be an issue of the opponents denying some element of the Gospel or its teaching, but it must be a matter of interpretation.[134] This understanding of the area of disagreement means that from the perspective of the opponents, it was they who represented the original and authentic Johannine community and the party to which John writes which represents the schismatic group.

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[130] Brown, *Epistles*, 69.

[131] Brown, *Community*, 29.

[132] Brown, *Epistles*, 72.

[133] Brown is supported in this understanding of the relations between John's Gospel and the First Epistles by Martinus De Boer, "The Death of Jesus Christ and His Coming in the Flesh (1 John 4:2)," *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991): 331, and Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 37.

[134] Brown, *Epistles*, 69.

Brown presents the Johannine community in the late first century CE as an independent Christian movement. His understanding of the community represents a different paradigm than that utilized by the proto-Gnostic hypothesis. The latter presumes a sort of "mainstream" Christianity represented by John and by the community as a whole. This community was then afflicted by a heresy, a faction with teachings outside this "mainstream."[135] For reasons already discussed, and because of this paradigm, Brown's hypothesis does not identify the opponents with any known second century CE heresy. He does, however, see the historical fate of the two factions in the second century within the realm of larger movements.[136] The party to which 1 John is written would later become a part of what Brown calls "the Great Church," which emerges for Brown only in the latter half of the second century CE. Based on the apparent points of contact between the beliefs of the opponents and Docetism, Gnosticism, and Cerinthianism, Brown believes their community ultimately became a community within the Gnostic movement of that same century. He is clear, however, that it is not correct to identify John's party with Christianity as it ultimately emerged, nor the party of his opponents with those other later movements.[137]

Whereas the proto-Gnostic hypothesis seeks to interpret the position of the opponents by the external evidence of a known early heretical movement, Brown interprets their position through the external evidence of John's Gospel. For Brown, the dispute revolves around the interpretation of that authoritative text as a critical element of a common tradition shared by both sides. Any position imputed to the opponents must be able to be demonstrated as naturally

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[135] Brown, *Community*, 29.

[136] Brown, *Epistles*, 71.

[137] Brown, *Epistles*, 67.

arising from this tradition in general and the Gospel's text in particular.[138] His understanding of the nature of the dispute naturally causes Brown to focus his interpretation of the points of dispute in 1 John on areas in which he perceives that the teaching of John's Gospel may be ambiguous. The views of the opponents, for Brown, must represent a possible interpretation of the Gospel and taken together must have some form of internal logic.[139] While the common Johannine tradition may have, and likely did, extend beyond the confines of the Gospel, it is only the Gospel to which the interpreter of 1 John has access.

Understanding the dispute as centered in preceding textual tradition creates for Brown a certain difficulty regarding the text of John's Gospel. While there is fair evidence that the Gospel preceded 1 John and that they are addressed to a common community, the exact shape of the Gospel as held by the community at the time of the composition of 1 John is subject to question.[140] There are a variety of redactional questions open for debate regarding significant segments of the Gospel which could potentially bear upon the issues of controversy addressed by 1 John. More to the point, scholars suggest that some segments of the Gospel which bear evidence of redactional activity were edited or added to the text in direct response to controversies within the Johannine community, including those addressed by 1 John.[141] Though others following Brown have incorporated multiple redactional layers of John's Gospel into their specific hypotheses regarding the opponents, Brown sets this aside as a secondary matter in his interpretation of 1 John, though he is aware of the issue.

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[138] Brown, *Epistles*, 72–73.

[139] Brown, *Epistles*, 72–73.

[140] Brown, *Epistles*, 73.

[141] Brown, *Epistles*, 73.

1. The Christology of 1 John and John's Gospel

As in the proto-Gnostic hypothesis, Brown sees the core of the contention between John and the opponents as a question of Christology. Brown, however, sees this Christological issue as emerging from the high Christology of John's Gospel.[142] Brown views the Gospel's Christology as uniquely high, based on his comparison to other New Testament documents. From this, and the Jewish opponents in the Gospel itself, Brown argues that this high Christology was a unique constitutive factor in the identity of the Johannine community, over against other Jewish and Christian communities. The importance of Christology to the identity of the community explains both the stakes involved in the dispute and the reason that disagreement would bring about a break within the community. Brown finds evidence in the Gospel for a breach with Judaism over precisely this theological position.[143]

For Brown, the position which was taken by the opponents resulting in the breach was a Christology which was, in a sense, too high. John's Gospel presents Christ as the pre-existent Son who brings eternal life, the life of God, into the world.[144] He presents signs of his identity to bring people to belief in him, through which they partake of this eternal life. Through his eternal relationship with the Father, he perfectly reveals the Father through his words and actions. Brown goes so far as to argue that from John's Gospel one can read an incarnational

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[142] Brown, *Epistles*, 74.

[143] Brown, *Epistles*, 74.

[144] Brown, *Community*, 111.

soteriology.[145] Such a Christology would see Christ's person, his existence as God and man, is not only revelatory but salvific. Brown sees this general schema reflected in 1 John, as well as in the Gospel, and so identifies it as part of the Johannine community's common heritage (1 John 1:2; 3:8; 4:19, 14; 5:6, 20).[146]

The opponents, then, in Brown's hypothesis, place their focus on this Christology, to the neglect of the life, and more crucially the death and resurrection of Jesus. While they did not deny the humanity of Christ, or that he had a material body and blood, these facts bear little importance in their theological understanding. Brown dismisses the idea that the opponents held a docetic Christology because there is no reasonable way to derive the idea that Christ's earthly life was merely an appearance from John's Gospel.[147] Rather for the opponents, the person of Christ as the preexistent Son is important, as are the teaching and knowledge which he brought into the world. The details of his earthly life, however, are important only in so far as they might bring attention to or reveal the former.[148] The events of Jesus' life, including his death on the cross, are not important in and of themselves nor do they accomplish something as such.[149]

Brown takes 1 John 5:6–8 as a test case for his hypothesis, arguing his thesis over against the proto-Gnostic hypothesis.[150] The latter sees the reference to water in Cerinthian terms, referring to the baptism of Christ as the point in time at which a congruence began between the

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[145] Brown, *Epistles*, 75.

[146] Brown, *Epistles*, 76.

[147] Brown, *Epistles*, 76–77.

[148] Brown, *Community*, 111.

[149] Brown, *Epistles*, 76–77.

[150] Brown, *Epistles*, 77.

man Jesus and the divine Christ.[151] By this hypothesis, the opponents would have then seen the divine Christ as having departed before the crucifixion. Brown again points out that there is no hint of this in the depiction of the crucifixion in John's Gospel. The baptism of Christ by John is a key moment in John's Gospel and represents an important beginning point of the revelation to the world of who Jesus Christ is.[152] The significance of his baptism would, therefore, be part of the common tradition of the Johannine community.[153]

The dispute, for Brown, would then revolve around whether Christ's suffering and death, his blood, were of equal importance. First John 5:6–8 argues for the perspective that Jesus's suffering and death, and thereby his earthly life, are of preeminent importance. Brown then seeks to demonstrate how the opponents could, from John's Gospel, derive the opposite view.[154] He makes a comparative argument, contrasting John with the Synoptic Gospels. By comparison, John's Gospel places little emphasis on the suffering of Jesus, both mental and physical. John emphasizes rather that Jesus is in control of his own life, that he lays it down, rather than someone taking it from him. It is possible to then treat Christ's death and resurrection as merely one more sign of his identity and validation of his revelatory message.[155]

It is reasonable to ask, however, in response whether this emphasis would stand out in relief to a community reading John's Gospel on its own, without comparison to the Synoptics. Brown makes no case that the Johannine community had access to all four. Quite the opposite, he sees the Synoptics as the possession of the nascent "Great Church," from which the Johannine

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[151] As Jobes, *1, 2, 3 John*, 221.

[152] This is true despite the fact that the baptism proper remains unnarrated in John's Gospel.

[153] Brown, *Epistles*, 77–78.

[154] Brown, *Epistles*, 78–79.

[155] Brown, *Epistles*, 79.

community is at this point separated.[156] The argument that because a given community's authoritative text places less emphasis on the sufferings of Christ than other Christian communities' texts the members of that community might minimize the importance of those sufferings assumes a level of self-awareness by the members of that community that Brown's historical reconstruction would make impossible.

2. Ethics in 1 John and John's Gospel

The external evidence of John's Gospel gives Brown a greater body of material to relate to the ethical elements of 1 John than the proto-Gnostic hypothesis, which relies mostly upon conjecture in the moral realm. Because both communities see the Gospel as a shared tradition, Brown argues that the opponents were not themselves immoralists. John does not at any point condemn them for scandalous or notorious immoral behavior. Rather, Brown sees them as practicing a sort of moral neglect.[157] Just as the opponents did not, as the Docetists, deny the human Jesus, so also they did not deny all moral teaching. Just as they neglected the importance of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, so also they neglected the importance of moral purity. Just as they saw no particular salvific power in the works of Christ, they saw no particular salvific importance in the ethical life of believers. Positively, they saw salvation as a matter of identity, rather than as something which was pursued and achieved.[158]

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[156] Brown, *Epistles*, 71.

[157] Brown, *Epistles*, 80–81.

[158] Brown, *Epistles*, 81–83.

As was the case in Christology, Brown sees 1 John as arguing for a both/and approach. He does not deny the common tradition that sees the community as a unique people called out of the world, marked out by belief. He argues that along with this status comes the necessity of repentance and an ongoing life of moral purity.[159] Holiness is not a status granted based on belief, but rather something achieved through living a life walking as Christ walked. The difficulty in this argument comes in attempting to define just what moral principles the opponents would have promoted, and how, under this hypothesis. If the opponents were indeed not immoralists or given to behavior which would have been scandalous in the community, yet placed little emphasis on the believer's way of life, what restricted their morality? As a community called out from the world, John's Gospel indicates that this represents a change in the way of life for those entering the community.

One possibility might be that the opponents practiced an ethic based on the love of neighbor. The repeated ethical command of 1 John that the community ought to love one another would belie this identification. Brown cuts himself off from this possibility by arguing that the command to love in John's Gospel is never explicitly aimed at those outside the community, but rather represents and intra-communal love.[160] As he attributes this to the Gospel, Brown must then argue that both John's party and his opponents share this definition of love as a binding force within the community. Understanding this as a shared view of love has the effect of negating this major theme of 1 John by making it no longer an ethical demand, but rather a consolation to a community grieving its departed members. Brown sees the occasional invective directed toward the opponents in 1 John as evidence that the opponents, as those who have

[159] Brown, *Epistles*, 84–86.

[160] Brown, *Epistles*, 82–83.

departed the community, need no longer be loved.[161] A command to love the members of one's community group has little moral value.

3. The Johannine Community

Brown's hypothesis brings forward thematic and verbal connections between John's Gospel and 1 John. His case is sufficient to demonstrate that the identification made by the titles of Gospel and Epistle reflect real connections of thought and historical connections of community.[162] His case, however, is not sufficient to establish the authoritative priority within that community of the final form of the Gospel text at the time of the composition of 1 John. While Brown is adamant that an interpretation of the position of John or his opponents must be reasonably derivable from the text of the Gospel, he concedes that the text is only a portion of a common tradition. Further, while he leans upon the idea that the text is itself authoritative in the Johannine community for both parties involved in the dispute of 1 John, nowhere does 1 John make a direct appeal to the text of the Gospel or any other text. Brown's argument against a docetic identification of the opponents, namely the lack of an appeal to authoritative human leadership within the community,[163] can equally be leveled at Brown's own hypothesis. There is a lack of an appeal within 1 John to the authority of any text.

While Brown effectively argues that both texts reflect a common communal tradition, he is not successful in demonstrating dependence between one text and the other. Even under the

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[161] Brown, *Epistles*, 83.

[162] These connections as such, apart from Brown's theory of the composition of the community and the identity of the opponents, will further be discussed later.

[163] Brown, *Epistles*, 58–59.

conditions of his argument, he is unable to isolate the totality of the beliefs of John and his opponents to the direct teaching of the text of John's Gospel. Without the external evidence of the text of John's Gospel, much like the proto-Gnostic hypothesis once external evidence of early heresies is set aside, Brown's hypothesis fails to justify itself. If the Gospel cannot be logically established to be an objective guide, Brown's characterization of the opponents, and even that of 1 John becomes unsupported conjecture.

D. Other Hypotheses

The proto-Gnostic hypothesis and Brown's approach have come to predominate discussion of the background of 1 John. There have, however, been some minority positions taken regarding the identity and character of the opponents addressed by 1 John. Many of these can be characterized as variations on one of these two preceding hypotheses, attempting in one way or another to compensate for weaknesses and inconsistencies in these identifications. Many of the views which depart from these two approaches enter into the realm of speculation. Because no known early heresy precisely matches what one can reasonably conclude from the text of 1 John regarding the opponents, a belief system may be constructed out of whole cloth, and then hypothesized to have existed in the first century CE.[164] The earlier recension of John's Gospel may be imagined based on a particular reading of the opponents of 1 John, and then hypothesized to have existed in written form in the historical Johannine community.[165] Two Christian groups, the community of 1 John and the opponents, may be conceived concerning

[164] Brown, *Epistles*, 67–68.

[165] Streett, *Opponents*, 11.

nothing but the text of the Epistle.[166] What all of these approaches have in common is a detachment from any objective standard of verification or disqualification for the hypothesis. Lack of falsifiability likewise means that these hypotheses lack explanatory power. A community, or opponents, constructed from an interpretation of the text cannot provide aid to the interpretation of the text from which it was constructed.

Various hypotheses regarding the opponents and the dissension within the community are also not mutually exclusive. It has become common to bring together elements of various hypotheses to explain the variety of data presented by 1 John. Smalley, for example, proposes both a Jewish group of opponents who have retreated from identifying Jesus as the Messiah and a Gentile group influenced by docetic and proto-Gnostic ideas.[167] This distinction between a Jewish group and a Gentile group has become a common means of sorting the data and ascribing some statements of John to one group, others to the other. Such an approach has explanatory power in justifying the data of 1 John. The anomalous data which would normally disqualify a particular hypothesis can be explained well by an alternative. It does not, however, provide the reciprocal relationship of aiding in interpretation. Rather than the identity of the opponents and the situation addressed by the texts affecting the interpretation of the text, difficulties in interpretation are remedied by hypothesizing a different addressee for particular portions of the text.

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[166] Bauckham summarizes the chief problem with this approach, the creation of a hypothetical community with reference to only the internal evidence of the Gospel. His arguments apply equally to the community hypothesized as background for the Epistle as they are most often regarded as similar, if not the same, community. Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 9–12.

[167] Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, xxiii–xxv.

Smalley's hypothesis requires two suppositions. First, the opponents addressed in 1 John are clearly identified as secessionists. They have left the Johannine community. While it is possible to hypothesize many varieties of theological error within a given community which stand in need of correction, there is nothing in the text of 1 John to indicate that multiple sectarian groups of different characters have all departed from the community. Nor, in the "opponents texts" is there any indication of a change in addressee. Second, Smalley assumes the presence of a group of culturally pagan Gentile converts within the Johannine community who have lately departed.[168] Both 1 John and John's Gospel can clearly be seen to have a Jewish background and to argue from the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. Familiarity with Jewish faith and practice is presumed by the text of 1 John. There is no evidence of argumentation within 1 John which can be seen to direct itself toward a group which has not been assimilated into the Johannine community which has a Jewish character.

E. The Background of John's Gospel

There are significant thematic and verbal connections between 1 John and John's Gospel.[169] These correlations are not sufficient to support Brown's hypothesis, which requires direct dependence by 1 John and the opponents upon the text of the Gospel. They are, however, sufficient to support a common community background for both the Gospel and the Epistle. Every interpretation by John or his opponents does not have to be traced back to the text of the

[168] Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, xxiii–xxv.

[169] These connections are readily apparent even on a surface reading in translation. Stott, *Letters of John*, 21.

Gospel or a hypothetical stage of its development.[170] The commonalities do serve to indicate that what can be said broadly regarding the makeup of the community which stands behind the Gospel can likewise be applied to the community in the background of 1 John.

Despite these connections and strong arguments for the common background of these communities, a shift has taken place in the understanding of the background of John's Gospel which, unfortunately, has not been paralleled in the understanding of the community behind 1 John. This shift, over a century, has been extreme. The scholarly consensus had previously argued that John's Gospel was itself the product of a proto-Gnostic or even Gnostic community.[171] Key texts within John's Gospel, such as the prologue, were understood against a background of Greek philosophy and religious thought. While the Synoptics were understood to be in some sense Jewish in background, the product of Jewish-Christian communities, John was argued to be Greek, and finding its origins ultimately in paganism and esotericism.[172] The dualistic language which characterizes both the Gospel and the Epistle was taken to have originated in these Gentile religious and philosophical movements.

A series of textual finds and intertextual work connecting John's Gospel, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the literature of Second Temple Judaism have now largely overthrown these hypotheses. In contrast to the interpretations of the Gospel which held sway for much of the twentieth century, John has now been called the Gospel which is most firmly grounded in the

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[170] Brown sees both the position of 1 John and the position of the opponents as firmly grounded in John's Gospel, with later phases of the redaction of the Gospel intended to counter the interpretation of the opponents. Brown, *Epistles*, 108–112.

[171] Bultmann's Gnostic approach to John's Gospel loomed large in this regard, shaping the debate for decades.

[172] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 31.

Jewish thought and worldview of the first century CE.[173] A Jewish background for the community of 1 John and the intra-Jewish nature of the conflict with the opponents has only begun to be hypothesized about the Epistle. The discussion of the background of John's Gospel is not so tentative. The common community behind the Gospel and Epistle supports the understanding that the community to which 1 John is written is one whose self-identity exists within the sphere of Judaism.

1. Conceptual Connections Between Epistle and Gospel

The connections between John's Gospel and 1 John are not newly discovered. In even the earliest discussions of the authority of the texts which would come to make up the New Testament, the Gospel and the First Epistle were grouped together.[174] The awareness of this connection was true without regard to a commenter's opinion on the remainder of the Johannine literature.[175] This connection is not merely a product of the traditionally ascribed authorship of both texts. Rather, it is deeply ingrained in the two texts and discovered through a comparative reading. Common authorship is not necessary, nor is any particular order of composition required to demonstrate that there is a shared community background to both documents.[176]

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[173] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 171.

[174] Irenaeus clearly identifies the author of John's Gospel and the author of 1 John as the same apostle John. *Against Heresies*, 3.16, 5–8.

[175] Dionysius of Alexandria, for example, was adamant that the book of Revelation was of completely different origin than John's Gospel but thought it abundantly clear that 1 John shared a common origin. He did not simply identify a single author but made pains to describe the verbal and conceptual connections between the text of the Gospel and the text of the Epistle. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 7.25.18–23.

[176] Distinguishing the unity of the recipient community is important because there is no consensus to be had regarding unity of authorship. Dodd is a notable opponent of common authorship. Schnackenburg once favored it, but later rejected it. Brooke, Law, and Kümel continue to favor it. Further, the advancement of various theories

There is a remarkable correspondence between the text of John's Gospel and 1 John. This correspondence is true at the level of vocabulary, which the two share substantially in common, and the conceptual content of the two texts.[177] In addition to the vocabulary used, there are significant similarities throughout both texts in grammatical construction. There are also significant parallels in terms of structure, despite the great difference in length between the two texts. Both texts feature prologues which exhibit stylistic connections to each other which are not paralleled by any of the other New Testament documents (John 1:1–18; 1 John 1:1–4). Likewise, the conclusions of the two texts each state the purpose for the writing of the text in parallel ways (John 20:31; 1 John 5:13).[178] These parallels at opening and close of the text are particularly striking in the case of 1 John, as they represent a deviation from the then standard epistolary format.

At the conceptual level, the mode of argumentation utilized within 1 John bears clear connections to the rhetoric employed in John's Gospel. The Gospel describes those who do not believe in and follow Jesus as walking or dwelling in darkness (1:5; 3:19–21; 8:12; 12:35, 46). Likewise, in condemning the opponents, 1 John described them as walking in darkness (2:9–11).[179] The role of the Spirit in the Gospel of John is described as, in part, to convict the world concerning righteousness (16:8,10). 1 John rebukes the opponents' claim to be righteous (3:7–8). In John's Gospel, Jesus condemns his opponents by describing them as children of their father the devil (8:44). 1 John says the same regarding the opponents within the community (3:10–

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regarding the redaction of the text of John's Gospel add the further difficulty of identifying one of several authors/redactors of the Gospel with the author of the Epistle. Marshall, *Epistles*, 32.

[177] Extensive lists and charts of parallels have been compiled by several scholars, among them Westcott, *Epistles*, xi-xii and Brown, *Epistles*, 757–760.

[178] Brown, *Epistles*, 21.

[179] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 26.

11).[180] The metaphor of blindness is used in John's Gospel to describe the opponents of Jesus (9:39–41; 12:40). John uses the same metaphor of being blinded to describe what has happened to the opponents (2:11).[181]

Commenters have suggested countless other parallels and points of contact. The quantity and nature of these connections exceed even the verbal connection between Luke and Acts which are generally considered to have the same author. The closeness of the two texts parallels texts such as Colossians and Ephesians or 1 and 2 Thessalonians.[182] While there is significant debate about the authorship of those texts, there is general agreement that they are connected at least at the level of community background if not a literary dependence. The case is such that the burden of proof would lie with an argument that would seek to disconnect the Gospel and Epistle.[183]

Arguments that seek to see distinctive differences between the Gospel and the Epistles are, however, made and often become granular.[184] As much similarity as there is in vocabulary, grammar, and style there are variations in all three of these between Gospel and Epistle. One is not composed entirely of quotes from the other or of stereotyped phrases also exhibited in the other. A number of the stylistic metrics proposed to contrast the two texts are subjective. Whether or not any particular phrase originated in an Aramaism, for example, is subject to debate.[185] Other statistical differences bear upon differences in textual genre. The Gospel uses a

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[180] Brown, *Epistles*, 93.

[181] Brown, *Epistles*, 93.

[182] Brown, *Epistles*, 21.

[183] Stott*, Letters*, 13.

[184] Holzmann produced a chart of some 50 differences in style, grammar, and vocabulary manifested by 1 John in comparison to the Gospel. These focus on minor grammatical features such as the use of prepositions, particles, and compound verbs.

[185] Brown, *Epistles*, 22.

greater number and variety of prepositions than the Epistle, but this is true of any comparison of the New Testament gospels with any of the New Testament epistles.[186] Likewise, the continuous use of "then"[187] throughout the Gospel does not occur once in 1 John. The use of "then," however, is a feature of the narrative.[188] Most tellingly, the statistical differences adduced against a common background for the Gospel and Epistle apply equally if one compares the words of Jesus in John's Gospel to the narrative sections.[189]

Stronger as an argument are contrasts made concerning the theological content of John's Gospel and that of 1 John.[190] Those arguing for the dissimilarity of Epistle and Gospel point out that there are particular qualities or actions predicated of God in 1 John which the Gospel predicates of Christ.[191] First John 1:5 describes God as light. Christ is the light in John's Gospel (1:4, 9; 8:12). First John repeatedly speaks of the commandments of God (2:3–4; 3:22–24; 4:21; 5:2–3). The Gospel speaks of the commandments of Jesus (13:34; 14:15,21; 15:10, 12). This difficulty, however, is easily resolved by the Gospel's emphasis that Jesus and the Father are one (10:30), and that Christ does the works of his Father, which would include giving his commandments (5:19–20; 8:28).[192]

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[186] Brown, *Epistles*, 23.

[187] The particle οὖν.

[188] Marshall, *Epistles*, 32–33.

[189] Brown, *Epistles*, 24.

[190] The vast majority of these are catalogued by Moffatt in his expansive argument against common authorship. These arguments, however, go beyond the sphere of individual author to touch upon the core of both texts and perceived differences. James Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1918), 589–593.

[191] Marshall, *Epistles*, 34.

[192] Brown, *Epistles*, 26.

Others argue that the Christology of 1 John is lower than that of the Gospel. They make this argument based on the emphasis in 1 John on the tangible, physical nature of the incarnation in flesh and blood (1:1; 4:2). They contrast the incarnational emphasis of the Epistle with the emphasis in the Gospel on the glory of Christ. This argument presupposes that an emphasis on one element of the incarnation constitutes a corresponding denial of the other. John's Gospel is, from the beginning, clear that "the Word became flesh" (1:14). A similar argument is made about Christ's death, which 1 John connects to atoning sacrifice (1:7; 2:2; 3:16; 4:10). It is argued that in John's Gospel Christ's death is more often presented as his victory and glorification (12:27–32; 13:1; 14:30–31; 16:10–11, 33; 17:1).[193] John 1:29, on the other hand, identifies Jesus as the lamb of God which takes away sin.[194] Again, an emphasis on one aspect of Christ's death does not constitute a denial of others. Another similar argument is made regarding the eschatology of the Gospel, which is seen as being primarily, or even entirely, realized, whereas 1 John envisions an approaching final judgment.[195] Redactional arguments made by Bultmann and others that all elements of final eschatology in John's Gospel are the product of later editing have complicated this argument.[196] The argument based on eschatology is ultimately circular and seeks to draw a contrast through an over-simplification of each text for purposes of that contrast.

Another attempted area of contrast is that of pneumatology. The Spirit is particularly prominent in John's Gospel. While the term "Holy Spirit" is not used in 1 John, the Spirit is

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[193] Stott, *Letters*, 25.

[194] Brown, *Epistles*, 26.

[195] Stott, *Letters*, 25–26.

[196] Bultmann, *John*, cxvi–cxxi.

referred to extensively (3:24; 4:13; 5:6, 8), in addition to other further possible references within the Epistle.[197] As a subset of this argument, those advancing it point out that the term "Paraclete" is a specialized term used by the Gospel for the Spirit, it is used of Christ in 1 John 2:1. It should be noted however that Jesus in John 14:6 refers to the Spirit as "another Paraclete," which does not preclude, but rather suggests, that he also fills this role.[198]

A final point of contrast impacts directly upon the bearing of a Jewish background for John's Gospel on the community background of 1 John. It points out that while the Gospel features frequent quotations from the Jewish scriptures, 1 John contains no such direct quotations.[199] While this is a statement of fact, this does not indicate of necessity a disconnect between 1 John and the Jewish scriptural tradition.[200] The example of Cain serves a central purpose in 1 John's argument (3:12–15).[201] Further, the language of 1 John partakes deeply of the language of Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic. The direct quotation of authoritative texts is only one means of orienting one's self within a community of belief, not the sole or even primary one.[202]

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[197] Brown, *Epistles*, 26–27.

[198] Stott, *Letters*, 14.

[199] Brown, *Epistles*, 27.

[200] Jensen, "Paradigm," 13.

[201] This is not only a reference to the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel, but directly refers to Jewish tradition which had grown up surrounding these two figures. Olsson, *Letters*, 190, 330–331.

[202] Carson says regarding 1 John that "the Old Testament is not so much a source that is quoted as the very matrix of reflection of a Christian who for many years has though hard about the relation of Christian truth to antecedent revelation." D. A. Carson, "'You Have No Need that Anyone Should Teach You' (1 John 2.27): An Old Testament Allusion that Determines the Interpretation", *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B. W. Winter on His 65th Birthday*, ed. P. J. Williams, A. D. Clarke, P. M. Head and D. Instone-Brewer. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 274.

The various arguments advanced to attempt to separate 1 John from John's Gospel are insufficient to the task. This insufficiency is even more pronounced considering the significant burden of proof needed to overcome the weight of evidence which connects the two, at least at the level of community background. There is no compelling evidence that both texts cannot have been directed to the same, or a very similar community. Real world religious communities are capable of nuance and depth of belief wherein multiple perspectives, significances, and emphases on religious events and persons can coexist. Evidence produced by those seeking to separate these two texts rely instead on a constructed either/or to invent contrasts which do not naturally present themselves from the texts in question.

2. The Jewish Background of John's Gospel

In the first half of the twentieth century, significant scholarship proposed a variety of non-Jewish Hellenistic backgrounds for John's Gospel and the community to which it was directed.[203] Several factors have contributed to a shift in thought to appreciate the Jewish milieu which gave rise to the Gospel. Manuscript finds have revised the dating of the Gospel to an earlier period, placing it before the rise of the Gnostic schema which had been proposed by some as the background of the text. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in particular the vocabulary and nature of many of the apocalyptic community texts therein demonstrated that many features of John's Gospel formerly ascribed to Hellenism were perfectly at home in Palestinian

[203] Much of the turn to a Hellenistic, if not outright Gnostic, background to John's Gospel took place as a result of the work of the "history of religions" school. The view was then championed by Bultmann. D. A. Carson, *Gospel*, 31–32.

Judaism.[204] So thorough has been this reevaluation that more recent scholarship has identified John's Gospel as not only a thoroughly Jewish text but as the most Hebraic text of those which came to form the New Testament.[205]

First and foremost, the use of Jewish scriptures, particularly in Greek translation, is a constant feature of John's Gospel. The imagery of Exodus and Isaiah are particularly pronounced, though the Gospel cites a range of textual sources.[206] While John occasionally explains particular geographical features and Palestinian usages, significant Jewish religious parties, and quotes from Jewish scriptures are not given any explanation. These tendencies assume a familiarity from the audience with the objects of his references and a common acknowledgment of the authority of his citations.[207] The entirety of the Gospel's narrative is structured around the cycle of Jewish feasts in Jerusalem, which the text references without any detailed description as to what they commemorate or when precisely they occur, even though these details often provide relevant background to the sayings and events which John sets within that background.[208] This structure and its related assumptions form the strongest argument that John's Gospel was written in and for a Jewish context. Significant portions of the text would make no sense outside of that context without information that John feels no need to supply.[209]

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[204] Pivotal works in transforming the consensus on the background of John's Gospel include Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966–70); J.L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); John A.T. Robinson, "The New Look on the Fourth Gospel," in *Twelve New Testament Studies* (London: SCM, 1962), 94-106.

[205] Keener, *Gospel*, 172.

[206] Keener, *Gospel*,172–173.

[207] Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylen, *John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 5–6.

[208] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 8.

[209] Keener, *Gospel*, 175.

John anticipates that the community to which he writes understands not only the Sabbath, and issues regarding Sabbath regulations as elaborated and practiced by the Pharisees (5; 7:22–23), but also the feasts of Passover (2; 6; 18–19), Tabernacles (7–10), and Hanukkah (10:22–39). He refers to jars of water for purification without further elaboration on their use (2:6). The Gospel refers to the laws surrounding the testimony of witnesses, both in how many are required, and whether a man can testify on his behalf (8:13–18).[210] In each of these cases, a relatively detailed understanding of relevant scriptural texts and then-current practice within Jewish communities is required to understand John's narrative correctly. The Gospel does nothing to provide that background.

Beyond these cultural elements of Jewish community life, the theological teaching of John's Gospel is dependent upon an understanding of the scriptural texts which underlie these cultural elements. The central point of much of John's discussion of the person of Jesus Christ is to define him in terms of imagery from the Jewish scriptures.[211] Jesus is the Paschal lamb (1:29, 36; 19:36). He describes himself as the ladder seen by Jacob in his sojourn (1:51). He comes as the Lord to purify his temple (2:12–22). He is lifted up as the serpent was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness (3:14).[212] John simply alludes to all of these images from the Jewish scriptures, with the expectation that community which constitutes the Gospel's audience will make the necessary connection between Jesus and Israel's history.

Jesus identifies himself with the manna which came down in the wilderness (6:32, 35) and as the spring of water rising up in the new temple prophesied by Ezekiel (John 7:37–39). The

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[210] Keener, *Gospel*, 175.

[211] Warren Carter, *John: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 131–132.

[212] Keener, *Gospel*, 175.

Gospel writer identifies Jesus as the one pierced as prophesied by Zechariah (John 19:37). He is proclaimed to be one who is greater than Moses, the paradigmatic prophet (5:46ff),[213] the patriarch from which Israel took its name (4:12), and Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people (8:53). His glory is identified with the divine glory which was seen in ancient times by Moses and Isaiah (1:14; 12:39–41). Christ identifies himself as the resurrection of the dead (11:25), a concept which was laughable in the non-Jewish Hellenistic world (Acts 17:32). He even goes so far as to identify himself with the name of the God of Israel directly (8:58). He identifies himself as the divine shepherd who was promised to come by Ezekiel (John 10:11).[214] Again, to understand the significance of narrative events and the words of Jesus in all of these cases requires a community life which is immersed in the Jewish scriptures and the traditions surrounding those scriptures as interpretation and practice.

None of this argues that the community to which John's Gospel was directed was solely composed of Jewish Christians. The orientation of the text, however, indicates that Gentiles who had entered that community, even if they had come to predominate eventually, had entered into a community with a Jewish self-identity.[215] It found that identity within the Jewish scriptures, and within the way of life, understanding, and interpretation of those scriptures. John makes extensive, nearly exclusive use of the Greek translations of the Jewish scriptures, which would represent the most familiar form of those scriptures to both the Jewish and Gentile elements of the community. John could then make his argument that Jesus is the Christ and that belief in him

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[213] For an exploration of the conceptual links between Christ as portrayed in John's Gospel and Moses as portrayed, in particular, in the book of Numbers, see Daniel Fletcher, "The Wilderness Motif in John 3:1–21 and Its Impact on Johannine Signs and Faith," Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2012.

[214] Keener, *Gospel*, 175.

[215] Keener, *Gospel*, 175.

granted eternal life by positioning Jesus within that pre-existing religious understanding.[216] The Johannine community of the Gospel is a community with a Jewish character and identity regardless of ethnic origins.

In addition to the explanatory power of the intra-Jewish hypothesis concerning the background of the conflict with the opponents of 1 John, the clear connections between the community addressed by both the Epistle and the Gospel demonstrate that the community in the background of 1 John is likewise a Jewish community.[217] First John therefore also speaks into a self-consciously Jewish self-understanding within the community, anticipating a level of understanding on the part of his hearers. Proper interpretation of any portion of 1 John's argument will, therefore, require the interpretation of the text through the lens of such a first century CE Christian community which is deeply Jewish in its outlook.

F. The Intra-Jewish Hypothesis

Recently, certain scholars have proposed another hypothesis regarding the identity of the opponents of 1 John and the dispute within the community. This hypothesis proposes a different background for the nature of the community itself. While this hypothesis like those others proposed for 1 John takes various forms, in broad terms, it sees the Epistle as being written against the background of a Jewish Christian community.[218] This Jewish community background

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[216] Richard Horsley and Tom Thatcher, *John, Jesus & the Renewal of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 149–152

[217] O'Day and Hylen, *John*, 5.

[218] Scholars arguing for a Jewish background to 1 John include Wurm, O'Neill, Thyen, Rusam, Griffith, Olsson, Witherington, Lieu, Hengel, and Okure. Painter sees this as a burgeoning trend in the interpretation of 1 John. Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 12.

means that the dispute which is taking place with the opponents is an intra-Jewish dispute. This identification is not purely ethnic; rather it is one of worldview, and community tradition and culture. It does not presuppose that the community did not contain Gentiles who had entered the community, only that the community which they had entered into understood itself within the context of Second Temple Judaism broadly. This Jewish self-understanding included both Jewish religious understanding and practice, as well as Hebrew and Greek Jewish scriptures.

The intra-Jewish hypothesis is the only hypothesis which exercises true explanatory power regarding the text of 1 John.[219] It is grounded in the internal evidence of the clear statements of the text about the dispute with John's opponents. At the same time, this hypothesis has interpretive value for the more ambiguous or debated elements of the text of 1 John. Further, the intra-Jewish hypothesis is the only approach which can take the relationship between 1 John and John's Gospel seriously. The increasing appreciation of the Jewish background of John's Gospel necessitates a reconsideration of the Jewish background of 1 John, and therefore the intra-Jewish nature of the conflict with the opponents to which the Epistle is addressed.[220]

There existed multiple religious forms or emphases within Second Temple Judaism. Of these, apocalyptic Judaism is particularly important to the understanding of the language and background of 1 John. The worldview of 1 John is thoroughly apocalyptic.[221] The importance of apocalyptic Jewish traditions to 1 John has been recognized broadly since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the translation of the sectarian documents contained therein in particular.

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[219] Streett, *Opponents*, 90.

[220] Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 11–14.

[221] O'Neill helped to set in motion the movement toward recognizing a Jewish background for 1 John by interpreting the Epistle against the background of the Qumran community and its apocalyptic literature. J.C. O'Neill, *The Puzzle of 1 John: A New Examination of Origins* (London: SPCK, 1966).

Much of the language of 1 John finds a direct parallel in the apocalyptic texts of the Qumran sectarian documents, such that other interpretations of this language, particularly a proposed relationship between it and Gnostic dualism, have begun to be cast aside.[222]

Apocalyptic elements in 1 John are focused around a particular type of dualism. There are opposing forces at work in the world, God and the devil, or the evil one (3:8; 5:18–19). Human persons follow one or the other and are thereby either children of God or children of the devil (3:1, 10). They are either children of light or children of darkness (1:7; 3:10).[223] Children by nature do the works of their father. There is no concept of a neutral or middle ground. This opposition is destined to come to a climax in which the righteous and good will emerge victorious over the wicked and evil. This orientation toward an eventual climax constitutes a final eschatology. All of these features are apparent in 1 John and also in Jewish apocalyptic literature such as the sectarian documents of Qumran.[224]

The dualism of apocalyptic Judaism, however, is a relative dualism, as opposed to the absolute dualism proposed by various forms of Gnosticism and most Hellenistic philosophy.[225] While it posits forces in opposition, these forces are not coequal or balanced. God is superior to his opposition and allows that opposition only for his purposes. Victory will come at the point of his choosing, and the resolution is not in doubt.[226] Additionally, in Jewish apocalyptic human

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[222] Lieu goes so far as to say that the parallels between 1 John and the Qumran sectarian literature "demonstrate the Jewishness of 1 John." J. M. Lieu, "What was from the Beginning: Scripture and Tradition in the Johannine Epistles," *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993), 459.

[223] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 18.

[224] *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is another apocalyptic Jewish text with significant parallels to 1 John. It exists, however, in a Christian recension with only some earlier Jewish recensions still available. It is in any case a window into the way in which early Christians appropriated apocalyptic language and literature. Lieu, *I, II, III John*, 24–25.

[225] Von Wahlde, *Judaisms*, 131.

[226] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 20–21.

persons are children of God or the devil through their own choice, rather than by their nature. The distinction between light and darkness is not ontological. Spirit or light or noesis as spiritual elements are not here opposed to the material elements which compose the world. Rather, the distinction is moral and ethical. The strong moral emphasis, on the life of the believer, continuing to walk in the light in 1 John is grounded in such a moral distinction.[227]

While the allegiance of a human person to light or darkness was voluntary, the actions which proceeded from this allegiance did so as a direct result. The observation of the behavior of a person was sufficient to discern where his true allegiance lay, and who his "father" in this apocalyptic sense was.[228] The connective tissue between allegiance and action was the influence of spirits, good or evil, clean or unclean. The emphasis on the testing of spirits which might seek to influence the behavior of members of the community is in keeping with the apocalyptic understanding.[229] The Spirit of God will give testimony to certain key truths regarding the identity of Jesus Christ, while a spirit of darkness will not. Such a spirit will testify not to Christ, but someone else instead of Christ, an "antichrist."

That 1 John speaks within this framework of apocalyptic Judaism is further evidence that the community receiving 1 John is one which has formed within a Jewish milieu. The argument follows a form of exhortation common in the community documents of Qumran and other Jewish apocalyptic texts.[230] This rhetoric requires a community with a self-understanding commensurate with the apocalyptic worldview. The community perceives itself as the children of God through

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[227] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 19.

[228] Von Wahlde, *Judaisms*, 132.

[229] Schmid, "Non-Polemically," 35.

[230] Von Wahlde, *Judaisms*, 133.

its allegiance to Jesus Christ. Those outside the community in the world, or who may leave the community, owe their allegiance to the evil one, the devil. This understanding of the community as a unit, *qua* space, separated from the world and opposed by it, will prove key to interpreting the text of 1 John.[231]

Olsson connects significant language in 1 John to the major "new covenant" passages Jer 31:31–34 and Ezek 36:25–28 in Greek translation. Jer 31:33–34 promises that God will put his law "within their understanding" and that they will "know the Lord."[232] First John 5:20 uses the same language to describe what Christ has given to the members of the community. First John 2:20 uses language from the same verses to say that the members of the community all know the truth, with 1 John 2:27 adding that they do not need to be taught. First John 1:9 uses the language of cleansing from unrighteousness and the forgiveness of sins drawn from Jer 31:24 and the language of cleansing drawn from Ezek 36:35. First John 2:7–8's language of the new commandment directly parallels the language of the new covenant from both passages.[233]

Against this background of the constitution and self-understanding of the community to which 1 John is written, the nature of the conflict engendered by the opponents emerges more clearly. The intra-Jewish hypothesis takes as its point of departure the plain meaning of the Greek of 1 John 2:22, that the antichrist is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ.[234] John's Gospel expresses the purpose of its writing that the reader might believe that Jesus is the Christ,

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[231] Schmid, "Non-Polemically," 34–35.

[232] Olsson, *Letters*, 308–309.

[233] Olsson, *Letters*, 309–310.

[234] This verse also represents the first clear reference to the Johannine opponents. Jensen, "Paradigm," 7.

the Son of God (John 20:31).[235] The text of 1 John returns several times to this issue of the confession of Jesus as Christ and as Son of God (1 John 4:3, 15; 5:1, 5). The particular Jewish community to which 1 John is addressed had defined itself not only in terms of religious Judaism but also in the confession that Jesus is the Messiah.[236] The opponents of 1 John who had gone out from the community had done so because they no longer believed in the messianic identity of Jesus, meaning that they had reverted to their previous affiliation with the non-Christian synagogue.[237]

First John 4:2–3 emphasizes, then, not the flesh in which Christ came as opposed to spirit or phantasm, but the fact that he has indeed come. The language of Jesus or the Christ coming is profuse in John's Gospel (1:9, 11; 3:2, 19; 4:25; 5:43; 11:27). In some of these cases, the text refers to a time "when the Christ comes" (John 4:25; 7:27, 32).[238] First John 4:2 can be seen within this understanding to indicate the confession that Jesus the Messiah has come and that this time has arrived. If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ, the Son of God, then the Messiah is a figure who is still to come, and the one who does not believe reverts from a stance of fulfillment to one of expectation.

In each case, this "coming" is related to the mission and work of the Messiah in the world. Further, Christ uses similar language of himself in John's Gospel, in the form "I have

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[235] Both Schnakenburg and Kruse concede that there is an emphasis on messianic identity on this passage and that the simplest explanation regarding the opponents is their identity as non-Christian Jewish believers despite holding to other, differing, hypotheses.

[236] Jensen, "Paradigm," 11; Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 157.

[237] This reversion is historically known to occur. As Okure points out, without the information from early church writers, scanty as it is, about the beliefs of the Docetists, the Gnostics, and the Cerinthians, this would be the natural reading of these texts. Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1–32* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 245.

[238] Olsson, *Letters*, 335.

come" (John 5:43; 9:39; 10:10; 12:27, 46–47; 16:28, 37).[239] In each of these cases, Jesus refers to either the purpose of his coming, his saving work, or that work itself. The preposition "in" is not normally used with the verb "to come." The phrase "to come in" is used only in John's Gospel and 1 John among the New Testament documents.[240] In John 5:43 and 12:13, this phrase refers to coming in someone's name, thereby serving as their representative and conducting their business.[241] If the language of coming indicates the purpose or work of Jesus as the Messiah, then what follows the preposition ἐν indicates the means or manner by which he accomplishes that purpose and work. In the case of 1 John 4:2, this indicates that the flesh of Jesus is how he accomplished his messianic purpose.[242]

The second related use of the phrase "to come in" in 1 John occurs in 5:6. Jesus Christ is the one who comes in or by water and blood, not water only. Water is here often taken to be a reference to baptism, specifically Christ's baptism.[243] Blood, on the other hand, well before the fifth chapter of 1 John has been used as a symbol of atonement and of cleansing from sin (1:7, 9; 2:2, 12; 3:5, 8, 16; 4:10).[244] Christ's baptism and his atoning death as the Paschal lamb frame the narrative of John's Gospel. After the resurrection, Christ imparts the Holy Spirit, the third witness of 1 John 5:8. It is also possible, though a minority view, that water in 5:6 represents not baptism but birth.[245] Second Temple Jewish texts such as 4 Ezra 8:8 use water to describe the

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[239] Olsson, *Letters*, 336.

[240] This phrasing is used once in the LXX, in Ps 118:26, quoted in John 12:13.

[241] De Boer, "The Death of Jesus Christ," 336.

[242] De Boer, "The Death of Jesus Christ," 337.

[243] Olsson, *Letters*, 348.

[244] De Boer, "Death of Jesus Christ," 337.

[245] Brown, *Epistles*, 575–576.

growth of a fetus within the womb.[246] This water imagery, coupled with the contrast in John's Gospel between John the Baptizer's baptism with water and Christ's with the Spirit leads some to see "water and blood" as equivalent to "birth and death."[247] Either way, however, 1 John 5:6 presents Jesus's career as the Messiah from beginning to end as an expansion of what it means that he came in the flesh.

First John 5:6 then provides one possible reason for the opponents' retreat from their confession of Jesus as the Messiah. John's Gospel presents the Jewish recoiling from the idea of a crucified Messiah through the person of Peter (13:3–10). Paul famously writes of the cross as a scandal to the Jews (1 Cor 1:23). First John 5:6–8 then makes the point that Jesus comes as the Messiah not only through his human life and ministry, but also his sacrificial death.[248] Rather than this death disqualifying him as the Christ, it testifies to his identity as the Christ (5:7–8). By recanting their previous confession, the opponents have not only denied the Messiah who has come in favor of another for whom they wait, but they have rejected the saving work which Jesus the Messiah has accomplished.[249]

In an important parallel with John's Gospel, the language used by 1 John toward the opponents is identical to that used by Jesus against his Jewish opponents. First John characterizes the opponents as claiming to have the Father while denying the Son (2:22–24).[250] Jesus tells the Pharisees that because they do not recognize him, they do not know the Father, but that if they

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[246] "And because you give life to the body which is being fashioned in the womb, and supplies it with members, what you have created is preserved in fire and water and for nine months the womb which you formed maintains your creation which has been created in it."

[247] Olsson, *Letters*, 348.

[248] Olsson, *Letters*, 351.

[249] De Boer, "Death of Jesus Christ," 339.

[250] Jensen sees Ps 2:7 in the background of both texts, uniting the Messiah to God in sonship. "Paradigm."

knew him, they would also know the Father (John 8:19). First John characterizes the opponents as the children of the devil (3:10). Jesus likewise tells the Jews who were following him that they are the children of their father, the devil (John 8:44). Specifically, Jesus points to the work of the devil in which those who are his children participate as murder, as does 1 John (3:12–15). By rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and returning to the fellowship of the synagogue, the opponents have not only left the community, they have allied themselves with the enemies of Jesus Christ, and so become like them. They are cut off from God through denial of Christ and so now dwell in the darkness, the domain of the evil one.

First John is written to remind those who remain in the community of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for them in his messianic work. He reminds them and the opponents of what the opponents have given up in turning from Jesus as the Messiah. This reminder serves as a warning to those within the community of the necessity of their continuing to walk in the light, in the way in which Christ walked before them.[251] This way of life in the community is summed up by love for one another, the same love which led Christ to lay down his life on their behalf (1 John 3:16). At the core of John's presentation of Jesus's messianic work is the priestly work of intercession and sacrifice described in 1 John 2:1–2.[252]

[251] Schmid, "Non-Polemically," 39–40.

[252] De Boer, "Death of Jesus Christ," 339.

IV. FIRST JOHN 2:2

First John 2:2 has been subject to remarkably stable interpretation within modern scholarship. The consistency of its interpretation is true despite the previously discussed shifts in the understanding of the community context into which the Epistle was written. Further, this consistency is itself evidence that interpretation of 1 John 2:2 has typically not been integrated into the proposed dispute with the Johannine opponents or the overarching argument of the Epistle as a whole. The identity of the opponents is treated as an independent question of interpretation and focuses on a few texts from the Epistle (1 John 2:22–23; 4:2–3; 5:6). Because 1 John 2:2 is not one of the texts identified as responding to the beliefs of the opponents, it is not interpreted in that light.

The argument that 1 John 2:2 is not a text referencing the position of the secessionists is largely circular. The distinction made in 2:2 does not readily appear to be a response to a position of Docetist, Cerinthian, or other proto-Gnostic parties. Nor does this distinction readily appear to be a question of the interpretation of John's Gospel. Because scholars have not enlisted this text as evidence for any of the major theories of the opponents' identity, it has gone unaddressed by subsequent theories in contesting that evidence. The typically employed strategy of "mirror-reading" to reconstruct the position of the secessionists from the Johannine community, when applied to the text of 1 John 2:2, does not produce a result which is commensurate with those reconstructed from the accepted "opponents" passages. 1 John 2:2 shares syntactic features with

5:6, specifically the "not only…but also…" argument structure. This parallel structure would suggest that it is making a parallel sort of argument.

There are several preliminary issues to address before the discussion of 1 John 2:2 and its place in the argument of the Epistle and the background of the intra-Jewish conflict within the Johannine community. First and foremost, the text of 2:2 must be defined. There is one significant textual variant to be discussed. The word commonly translated as "only" is either an adjective or an adverb depending upon the manuscript evidence.[253] Which of these two is the correct reading is directly pertinent to the overall grammar and syntax of this text.

There is a significant issue regarding the grammar and syntax of this verse. This issue is the propriety of inserting the pronoun in 2:2d. It is commonplace in English translation to supply this pronoun, rendering the text as "…those of the whole world."[254] This addition is not necessary to render the text in English and represents an interpretation rather than a translation as such. It understands Christ offering himself as an atonement for the whole world to mean for the sins of the whole world. While this interpretation is not impossible, it is not the only possible interpretation of the text and is not how the text reads. The more natural reading of the text comports with the intra-Jewish hypothesis of the background of the conflict in the Johannine community and thereby aids in the integration of the text of 1 John 2:2 into the overall argument of the Epistle.

[253] The text reads either μόνον or μονών.

[254] This is true not only in English but also in Luther's German which renders 2:2d as "sondern auch für die der ganzen Welt." The Latin, by contrast, reproduces the Greek verbatim as "sed etiam pro totius mundi."

Much of the interpretive discussion regarding 1 John 2:2 has focused not on 2:2d and the meaning of "the whole world,"[255] but rather on the meaning of the word ἱλασμός. Typically translated as "atonement,"[256] the nature of this sacrificial form is debated under the headings of propitiation and expiation. While the term is used twice in 1 John, in 2:2 and in 4:10, it must be interpreted not only in terms of its usage in 1 John and in other Greek literature, but also within the argument of the Epistle regarding the forgiveness of sins and sacrifice. Additionally, the intra-Jewish hypothesis places special emphasis on the use of the term within Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures.

A. The Text of 1 John 2:2

Within the text of 1 John 2:2, there is one area of significant textual variation centered in 2:2c. There are 19 manuscript variants as well as several lacunae in this portion of the verse.[257] First John 2:2cd reads, "οὐ περί των ἡμετέρων δέ μόνον ἀλλά καὶ περί ὅλου του κόσμου." The chief area of variation within this portion of the text is the replacement of μόνον, the adverb, with μονών, the adjective. The latter variant would be an adjective modifying των ἡμετέρων. The former would be an adverb modifying the implied action "atoning sacrifice" of the entire text.

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[255] This discussion has typically focused on issues related to the extent of the atonement, whether it be particular or general.

[256] The word "atonement" is not directly related to the Greek or Latin terms which it is commonly used to translate. It is a 16th century coinage derived from the Latin adunamentum and built from the Middle English "onement" meaning "unity." It is therefore a neutral term regarding the means and method of the restoration of unity whether between human persons or between human and divine persons. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v."atonement," Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

[257] As described in Barbara Aland, ed. *Catholic Epistles Vols. 1 and 2*. Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior, Vol. IV., Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgessellschaft, 2017. This is an increase from three noted in NA27.

Additionally, there is variation in the appearance of the "δέ… καὶ" construction within 1 John 2:2cd.

These variants produce four possible readings of the text. The variant options are μόνον with "δέ… καὶ", μόνον without "δέ… καὶ", μονών with "δέ… καὶ", and μονών without "δέ… καὶ".[258] All four of these options are represented in manuscript evidence. This variance is significant in that the question as to whether "only" is here functioning as an adverb or adjective has distinct interpretive consequences. There are clear means of evaluating these variants and arriving at a conclusion as to the correct reading of 1 John 2:2.

The primary manuscript attestation of μονών is in Codex B. There are a significant number of less important, later manuscripts with this variant, though many of them are questionable for various reasons. MS 33, for example, reads μονών, but the word has been the subject of successive layers of correction and change.[259] MS 424 contains μονών, but lists it as an alternate reading to μόνον. The same is true of MS 2412.[260] These manuscripts date from the 9th, 11th, and 12th centuries respectively. It is significant that all three of these manuscripts, by way of correction and alternate listed readings, bear witness to the reading μόνον.

Codices א and A support the reading of μόνον. Additionally, μόνον is supported by C Ψ* 35 81 2464.[261] While Codex B is a valuable early witness, the predominant witnesses indicate a reading of μόνον. The inconclusive, even ambivalent, evidence provided by many of the

[258] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 604.

[259] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 610.

[260] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 610.

[261] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 611.

manuscripts which do support μονών serves as a further witness.[262] As Do describes the results, the reading μόνον is also to be favored based on CBGM.[263]

The vast majority of manuscripts favor the presence of the "δέ… καὶ" construction in 1 John 2:2c. Some ancient versions, as well as patristic citations, also favor its inclusion.[264] To conclude that the "δέ… καὶ" construction is the preferred variant is therefore uncontroversial taking the manuscript evidence into account. The presence of this construction also serves to convey a certain emphasis within the text rather than having an important impact on interpretation among theological alternatives. The evaluation of this construction as preferred, however, has an impact on the issue regarding the variant μόνον. The majority of manuscripts containing the "δέ… καὶ" construction also read μόνον. Those texts containing the variant μονών also tend to omit the "δέ… καὶ" construction.[265] Therefore, the establishment of the "δέ… καὶ" construction as the preferred reading constitutes another piece of evidence in favor of the μόνον reading.

There is further internal evidence arguing for μόνον as the correct reading. The adjective μόνος does not occur in the genitive anywhere in the New Testament documents. In contrast, in the Gospel of John alone, μόνον is used five times (5:18; 11:52; 12:9; 13:9; 17:20).[266] Presuming, then, that one or the other variant is a product of intentional or unintentional scribal

[262] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 611.

[263] The Coherence Based Genealogical method produces 617 as the parent manuscript for the reading μόνον, but further hypothesizes a parent manuscript "A" for the parent manuscript of 617. Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 611.

[264] Including Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, and Didymus the Blind, all of whom were Alexandrian authors.

[265] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 612.

[266] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 613.

change, the confusion would be between the adjective, μόνος, and the adverb, μόνον. Beyond the obvious visual similarities, these two lexemes share some case endings.[267] The similarity of these lexemes, combined with the preceding genitive plural endings of των ήμετέρων, make a scribal error a strong possibility, particularly in manuscripts which omit δέ.

The reading μονών in 1 John 2:2c would also produce a grammatical anomaly. "Only" here occurs within a prepositional phrase and the construction "not only, but also." Within this construction, the occurrence of μονών as a postpositional adjective modifying των ήμετέρων would be strange to the point of uniqueness. It is possible, as in 2 John 1, for μονών to appear as a postpositional modifier to another adjective. Second John 1, however, is a nominal sentence which allows for a nominal adjective in its predicate, not a prepositional phrase.[268]

Based upon all of the external text-critical data as well as the internal data of usage, grammar, and syntax, the variant μόνον is to be strongly preferred. Scribal error, likely inadvertent, adequately explains the origin of the variant μονών within some manuscripts related genealogically to one another. That this variation was recognized is witnessed to by corrective activity and notation of the variation within several important manuscripts featuring the variant μονών. All of these considerations establish the preferred text of 1 John 2:2 as, "καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου."

[267] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 619.

[268] Do, "Μόνον or μονών," 621.

B. The Grammar and Syntax of 1 John 2:2

John refers to Christ being an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the community in two places, 1 John 2:2 and 4:10. In each case, he uses what appears to have already been accepted by the community as fact, that Christ is such an atoning sacrifice, to make a further qualification or argument. In 4:10, he straightforwardly describes this atoning sacrifice as the ultimate example of the love of God. His usage of the term in 2:2 is more ambiguous in that John states that Christ is a propitiation not only for "our sins," those of the community, but also περί όλου τοῦ κόσμου. Translations of this text have often supplemented the object "for the sins of the whole world."[269] Based upon this insertion, the verse has been used extensively in debates regarding the extent of the atonement and about the nature of propitiation[270] with the referent of "world" here in use.[271]

There is, however, some difficulty in legitimating this addition. If the text read περί τής όλου τοῦ κόσμου or περί τών όλου τοῦ κόσμου, then the suggested interpretation would be clear. While τών and τής are not, strictly speaking, necessary to convey the suggested meaning, it is not in keeping with the general style of 1 John to omit such a definite article. John displays a

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[269] This is true of a wide range of English translations produced by means of a wide range of translation strategies, including the NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB, KJV, CEV, GNT, and the Douay-Rheims.

[270] When a more developed theory of penal substitutionary atonement from other portions of scripture is brought to bear upon the discussion of propitiation here by John, the question of the extent of the atonement arises. Once one posits the reading "concerning the sins of the whole world" it is natural to ask whether this means that Christ suffered for the sins of every person in the world, or only those who would believe. This question became of particular import at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Yarborough, *1-3 John*, 80. This debate depends upon both the presupposition that John had an idea of penal substitution in view in this passage, and that it is correct to understand 2:2d as referring to the sins of the whole world. The first presupposition would have to be demonstrated from the overall argument of the Epistle, as even if it is established that John's Gospel, for example, teaches a form of penal substitution, it is not necessarily in view here.

[271] Based on the presuppositions described above, Western authors as diverse as John Calvin and Bede have understood "the whole world" of 2:2d as referring to all Christians at all times and in all places. While this may be feasible in isolation, this understanding is problematic as an understanding of any other usage of the term "world" in 1 John, and in particular the other usage of "the whole world" in 5:19, which states that "the whole world" lies under the power of the evil one.

tendency to use the definite article even when it is not grammatically necessary. Examples of such unnecessary repetitions of articles can be found in 1:1, "περί τοῦ λόγου τής ζωής," 1:3, "ή κοινωνία δέ ή ήμετέρα," 2:7, "ή έντολή ή παλαιά," and 2:8, "τό φώς τό άληθινόν."[272] Given John's propensity for the use of the definite article, it seems unlikely that he would omit it in 2:2 to clarify meaning if the suggested meaning was, in fact, his intent.

Further, this emendation is inconsistent with how John speaks concerning "the world" in the First Epistle. Κόσμος is a key term in the Johannine literature, occurring in John's Gospel and the First Epistle two and a half times more often than in the rest of the New Testament combined. The word is used 23 times in the First Epistle, but never in tandem with "sin."[273] "The world" serves as a point of origin and lies under the power of evil and of the devil, but the text never treats it as an agent of sin. Rather sin is everywhere ascribed to human agency.[274] It is therefore not possible to argue that the reference to όλου τοῦ κόσμου assumes sin. The world as an entity does not properly commit sins and so does not have sins which require atonement.

This emendation also understands the possessive adjective ήμετέρων as an attributive rather than as a substantive. The contrast in this emendation reads as, "not only ours but also those of someone/thing else." An alternative reading treats ήμετέρων as a substantive, "not only for our sins but also for something else." Where the adjective occurs in construct with a modified

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[272] Do, " περὶ όλου τοῦ κόσμου?," 417.

[273] Do, " περὶ όλου τοῦ κόσμου?," 424.

[274] The only possible exception to this rule in the Johannine literature is in John 1:29, in which Christ is identified as "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." The exegesis of this latter passage lies beyond the scope of the present inquiry, but suffice it here to point out that "the lamb of God" is used as a parallel title to the "son of God," and with the absence of specific atonement language attending, it is unclear at best that John 1:29 is speaking of the death of Christ in particular as the way in which Christ is "the one who takes away the sins of the world". It cannot therefore be brought in from John's Gospel to decide this case, even bearing in mind the thematic questions between the Gospel and the First Epistle. Further, the reference to a "lamb" is a reference to the animal involved in the Passover rather than the two goats involved in the Day of Atonement ritual. There is therefore not even an analogical connection to atonement language.

noun, it is attributive, as in Acts 2:11; 24:6; 26:5; Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 4:15. It occurs without a modified noun in Tit 3:14 and 1 John 1:3, but with the article to indicate its reading as a substantive. In both of these cases, the substantive is read with the implied noun supplied, "our people" and "our fellowship" respectively. These examples, including the only other usage of the adjective in 1 John, argue for reading τῶν ἡμετέρων in 1 John 2:2c substantively, as "our sins."

The other possibility for reading the text of 1 John 2:2, without emendation, is to place the phrases "concerning our sins" and "concerning the whole world" in parallel.[275] This structure for the verse then would make both phrases the objects of Christ's atoning sacrifice. As previously mentioned, that Christ is an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the community, and therefore continues to serve as their advocate before the Father (2:1),[276] appears to be already accepted by the audience of 1 John. To this is added the idea that not only is this true, but also that he is the atoning sacrifice for the whole world. "The world" is not here used to refer to only all of the people in the world, but as it is used in the rest of 1 John to refer to the world itself, to God's creation as it has fallen under the power of evil (5:19).[277]

There are then here two problematic points in the relationship between humans and God. The first is the sins of the people within the community. The second is the fact that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one (5:4–5). Both of these, considered against a Jewish background, represent barriers preventing the presence of God from remaining among his people. Christ offers himself as an atoning sacrifice to remedy both of these problems, the

[275] Brown, Plummer, and Westcott, among others, see this emendation as unnecessary. Brown, *Epistles*, 222.

[276] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 78.

[277] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 317.

people's sins and the impurity of the whole world through which the devil lays claim to it.[278] What Christ is not here said to atone for are the sins of those who do not believe, who therefore are cut off from the presence of God and face condemnation for their sin along with the world (3:8, 10).[279] The Epistle directly levels this consequence against the opponents. If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Messiah, then not only do they remain in their sins, but also that the world remains subject to evil and uncleanness.

This understanding then places the understanding of atonement, and specifically propitiation, in 1 John directly in line theologically with John 3:16–17. As in that text, the atoning work of Christ is the expression of the love of God (1 Jn 4:10). God directs his love toward the κόσμος, his creation, now fallen under the curse of sin and death (2:2). The means of the salvation of the world is in both cases the sending by the Father of His Son (4:9),[280] but the effects of the atoning sacrifice provided are received by those who believe in the purification of their sins. God is in Christ saving the whole world through the means of a believing, forgiven people. His love is manifest first and foremost in the death of Christ (4:10), but also in the love which this people has for one another (4:9, 11).[281]

The relevance of the extension John makes of the propitiatory work of Christ beyond the sins of the believers to the whole world also parallels his argument in 4:1–3. Here, the mark of the true Spirit and the true teacher is the profession that Christ "has come in the flesh" (4:2).[282]

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[278] Olsson, *Letters*, 128.

[279] Brown, *Epistles*, 219.

[280] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 192.

[281] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 238.

[282] Keith L. Yoder, "Spirit and Atonement in John," *Conversations with the Biblical World* 32 (2012): 152–153.

He has come in the "flesh" despite the "desires of the flesh" being one of the sources of sin, and one of the "things of the world" (2:16). It is at the same time clear that John is not attributing sin to Christ (3:5). By reaffirming the truth of the Messiah's atoning work, then, John makes clear that he is not condemning flesh *qua* physicality, but rather as sinful desire has enslaved it.[283] Humanity as a physical entity, like the other physical elements of creation, is not itself evil or sinful but lies under the power of the devil as a result of evil works.

Likewise, in 2:2, John makes clear that when he speaks of the world as opposed to God, as under the power of the evil one (5:19), and as the realm of sinful desires, he is not condemning the created order as such, but rather as it has been enslaved to human sin and through sin death.[284] God has not abandoned His world, leaving it under wrath and condemnation, but has in His love sent His son to offer himself as an atoning sacrifice for it, and save it through a believing people. To recant one's confession of Jesus as the Messiah and thereby leave the community to return to that of which one was previously a member is a forfeiture of that work through denial of its reality.

C. Atonement

The term ἱλασμός is the subject of discussion primarily regarding two competing views of the meaning of atonement. These two views take as their starting point the terms propitiation and expiation. These both represent understandings of how atonement deals with sin and restores unity between parties. Propitiation sees sacrifices of atonement as a means by which the wrath or

[283] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 178–179.

[284] Olsson, *Letters*, 128–129.

anger of one of two divided parties is mollified.[285] A formerly embittered or alienated party is rendered propitious through an offering. Expiation treats sin or general wrongdoing as a cause of alienation, a barrier to unity, which is removed using the offering.[286]

By using the term ἱλασμός in his First Epistle, John is explicitly characterizing the death of Christ as serving as a propitiatory sacrifice.[287] This term is used fairly extensively in the Septuagint, typically to translate words from the כָּפַר word group. It is likewise used by Philo in the context of sacrifices of atonement, specifically those of the Day of Atonement, as well as other sin offerings.[288] Beyond these examples, while similar concepts are addressed, there are no known usages of the term itself in Pre-Christian, non-Jewish literature. It is, however, used in two known cases in a much later work.[289] More relevant to this discussion, the term is used six times by Plutarch, roughly contemporaneously with its usage in 1 John though removed from any Jewish context.[290]

The Septuagint uses ἱλασμός at several significant points. It uses the term in Lev 25:9 to translate the name of the Day of Atonement. Likewise, it uses the term in the Greek translation of 1 Chron 28:20 to designate the purpose of the temple, here the 'house of atonement.' It is used in the Pentateuch to refer to that offering which is due to an offended party, or if the party or a

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[285] Olsson, *Letters*, 301.

[286] Olsson, *Letters*, 301.

[287] Other NT epistles certainly discuss atonement in great detail, particularly Hebrews, Romans, and 1 Corinthians, but here the idea of propitiation as such is in clear focus.

[288] *Special Laws* 1:186–8; 2:193–203; *On the Life of Moses* 2:23–24.

[289] The *Argonautica*, generally dated to the fourth century, at the earliest.

[290] The various treatises of Plutarch's *Moralia* are typically dated between 75 and 120 A.D., generally coinciding with the dating of composition of the Johannine literature. While there is some critical question regarding authorship of some of these treatises, those here referenced are from among the treatises widely considered to be genuine. Jintae Kim, "The Concept of Atonement in Hellenistic Thought and 1 John*," Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 2 (2001): 102.

close relative cannot be located to the Lord, to restore right relationships (Num 5:8).[291] An offering presented to God to turn away wrath against sin represents its most common usage in the Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures (Psalm 129:4, Ezek 44:27, Dan 9:9, II Macc 3:33). There are circumstances in which this offering to God is not accepted (Amos 8:14).[292]

The subsequent discussion of the non-Jewish usage of atonement is relevant to its meaning in the New Testament documents in general and 1 John in particular. There are reasons why the ἱλασμός word group was used across a wide range of cases to translate the כִּפֶּר word group.[293] However, against the background of an intra-Jewish conflict within the Johannine community, it is the usage derived from the Hebrew Scriptures which is paradigmatic for the usage of 1 John.[294]

Plutarch uses the term six times, always to refer to rites including offerings intended to please an offended party and thereby restore peace. Two of these usages have the spirits of deceased humans as the recipient of propitiation; the other four refer to deities which have been angered. It is worth noting that all six of these examples occur within the spiritual realm, rather than speaking of reconciliation between living humans. The confinement of this term to relations between humans and spiritual beings distinguishes Plutarch's usage from that of the Greek translators of the Hebrew Scriptures. First John argues for no disconnect between unity with God and unity with other living, human members of the Johannine community (4:20).

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[291] Kruse, *Letters*, 75.

[292] All previous references are to LXX divisions.

[293] Brown, *Epistles*, 219.

[294] Olsson, *Letters*, 302.

Two of Plutarch's usages bear further discussion for what they reveal concerning the nature of propitiation as seen in the time of 1 John's composition. The first example refers to the appeasement of an angered ghost. Plutarch was a priest of Apollo at Delphi, and uses the term ἱλασμός within his dialogue, "On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance."[295] Here he tells the story of Pausanius, the nephew of Leonidas, the king of Sparta who, having summoned a woman named Cleonice in the night, ended up killing her out of paranoid suspicion. She then proceeded to haunt him in his dreams and give him no peace. In response, Plutarch states that Pausanius traveled to what was believed to be an entrance to Hades, and there offered certain propitiations and libations (ἱλασμοῖς τισι καί ξοαῖς) to make her spirit present and appease it. That these propitiations and libations are specifically connected to sacrificial rites and blood seems clear from the direct parallel to this story in Odysseus' communication with the dead as described by Homer.[296] In this case, the propitiated entities rejected the offerings, but they were intended to mollify the vengeful spirit of Cleonice, angered at the injustice committed against her.[297]

A second example is also revelatory. In a later treatise,[298] Plutarch speaks concerning Ptolemy Philopator, the Greek ruler of Egypt in the late third century BCE. In celebration of a military victory over Antiochus, Ptolemy had rashly sacrificed four elephants as part of his offerings to the gods. According to Plutarch, because elephants are highly intelligent and worship the gods themselves, they are animals especially precious to the gods. The death of the beasts angered the gods. As with the previous example, the gods then threatened Ptolemy with

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[295] *Moralia* 555C.

[296] *Odyssey*, Books X and XI.

[297] Kim, "Hellenistic Thought," 102–104.

[298] *Moralia* 972B–C.

wrath in his dreams. In response, he made use of many propitiations (ἱλασμοῖς τε πολλοῖς ἐχρήσατο), and in addition to these propitiations, constructed four bronze elephants as an offering, an equal number to those whom he had killed. This example demonstrates that propitiation is not seen merely as a negative offering to demonstrate contrition, but also a positive offering, an attempt to please the offended party through positive action.

The idea of expiation, the removal of sin and its effects as a barrier to unity, has often been suggested as an alternative definition for ἱλασμός, over against propitiation. This is essentially a false dilemma. The ideas of propitiation and expiation are consistently linked together in contemporary sources. Plutarch, for example, in his *Life of Solon*, speaks of his subject having turned away the wrath of the gods against Athens by propitiations and cleansings (ἱλασμοῖς καί καθαρμοῖς).[299] Likewise, Philo states in his *De Victimis* that for atonement to take place, confession and subsequent good deeds must accompany the offerings of propitiation.[300] Sirach goes further in stating that repentance and turning from unrighteousness is itself a propitiation (35:3). Most importantly, 1 John itself links these ideas. The blood of Christ which cleanses from all sin (1:7) is applied when we confess our sins (1:9).[301] Expiation or cleansing is depicted as the application or result of a propitiatory offering, not as an alternative conception of the propitiatory offering itself.

These two elements, both propitiation and expiation, can be seen within atonement as it is described within the Hebrew Scriptures, including and exemplified by the Day of Atonement

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[299] *Solon*, 12.

[300] *On the Special Laws*, 1:235–238.

[301] Ed Glasscock, "Forgiveness and Cleansing According to 1 John 1:9," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (2009): 230.

ritual.[302] The sins of the people and the stain of uncleanness left by the sins of the people represent an impediment to God's continued dwelling among his people.[303] Sacrifice is necessary to remove this impediment, and cleansing is required to remove this taint of uncleanness.[304] If such atonement does not take place, there is a continued danger of the presence of God breaking forth within the camp as fire and consuming the people along with their sins, as was the case for Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:2). Their deaths represent a description of God's wrath, giving the atoning offerings the character of propitiatory sacrifices.

D. The World in 1 John

Conceptually, the term "the world" is used frequently in 1 John and also in the Gospel in a variety of contexts. This variety is explained typically by treating its usage individually and then placing these usages into broad categories. These categories are then allowed to conflict giving the impression that "the world" is used equivocally in the Johannine literature.[305] While it is true that there is not a single definition of "the world" which can functionally be substituted for that term in every usage in 1 John or the Gospel, it is not true that these usages are incommensurate when understood within the context of Jewish thought-forms of the first century CE. Against this

[302] Olsson, *Letters*, 302.

[303] Olsson, *Letters*, 302.

[304] Brown, *Epistles*, 219.

[305] Lieu, for example, acknowledges certain positive, or at least not outright negative, uses of the term κόσμος within 1 John (as in 2:2; 4:9, 14). She states however that these usages "do not represent the main thrust" of John's thought. This main thrust is, for Lieu, determined by the admittedly more common negative usages of the concept of "the world" as a force at enmity with the Johannine community. Rather than seeking a connection between these usages, Lieu marginalizes the former and embraces the latter as controlling. Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 92.

background, these varying usages of "the world" can be seen to be focusing on different aspects of a consistent understanding of the creation and its present state.

"The world" is a key term in John's Gospel and the Epistles. The word κόσμος occurs 185 times in the New Testament. Of these usages, 78 occur in the Gospel of John. Twenty-three of these usages occur in 1 John's considerably shorter text. One further usage occurs in 2 John, meaning that the Gospel and epistles account for 55 percent of the usages of the word in the New Testament.[306] The conceptual significance of "the world" for the Johannine literature generally and 1 John in particular has led to a significant number of surveys of its usage.[307] These surveys have the intent to develop a consistent cosmology for this literature. They have typically taken the form of dividing the usages into positive and negative usages, then subdividing these usages into more specific categories.

The word κόσμος has as wide a range of meaning as the word "world" in English.[308] Its usage in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and throughout the New Testament is equally diverse. Within John's Gospel, the negative and positive usages of the term distribute differently across the span of the text. In the first 12 chapters of the Gospel, positive usages of the term predominate.[309] These positive usages typically involve "the world" as the arena of God's saving activity. The latter portion of the Gospel manifests the opposite tendency,

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[306] Brown, *Epistles*, 223.

[307] The classic inventory of Johannine usage was made by Cassem. He ultimately finds John's usage in the Gospel and epistles to be not quite equivocal, but at least ambivalent. N H. Cassem, "Grammatical and Contextual Inventory of the Use of *Kosmos* in the Johannine Corpus with Some Implications for a Johannine Cosmic Theology," *New Testament Studies* 19, No. 1 (October 1972): 81.

[308] LSJ, s.v. "κόσμος."

[309] Such references outnumber negative references to "the world" by a factor of two to one. Brown, *Epistles*, 223.

preferring negative references to "the world."[310] These references generally portray "the world" as a hostile entity opposed to Jesus and dominated by hostile spiritual powers (as 12:31; 9:39). First John makes use of both of positive and negative understandings of "the world."

There has been a tendency to understand "the world" as "all the people in the world." This tendency represents a limiting of the scope of the term to only the human occupants of the world as opposed to the world itself and all of its contents. It also creates a potential misidentification of "the world" as referring to the Gentile or pagan worlds. John's Gospel, however, speaks of unbelieving Jewish opponents of Christ in identical terms to those used regarding the world as a whole in its enmity to Christ and his followers.[311] A recantation of a profession of Jesus as the Messiah and a return to the unbelieving Jewish community is, therefore, from the perspective of 1 John, as much a return to the world over against God's domain as a profession of false doctrine or a return to Gentile pagan worship.[312]

Following the reference to "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2, the world is again referenced repeatedly in 2:15–17. A commandment is given not to love the world or the things in the world. This phrasing makes it clear that the reference to the world is here a reference to the created world as a spatial reality. It is further space with contents.[313] First John reiterates this principle stating it as "if anyone loves the world." These references make it clear that "the world" can stand for both the spatial reality and its contents at once.[314] John goes on to define the love of the

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[310] In these latter chapters, these negative references predominate by a factor of between four and five to one. Brown, *Epistles*, 223.

[311] Compare, for example, John 8:44 and 14:30. Brown, *Community*, 63.

[312] Brown, *Epistles*, 471–472.

[313] Schnackenburg, *Epistles*, 134.

[314] Kruse, *Letters*, 94.

world as "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life." This desire for life in the world and the possession and gratification of its contents comes not from God but from "the world."[315] This final usage shifts the emphasis of the term by making "the world" an agent of malign influence. Yielding to the world presents a danger, because "the world" is passing away. That which is passing away cannot refer to the world as the arena of salvation or object of divine love which would not pass away. It must, therefore, refer to "the world" as this malign influence capable of corrupting human persons.

First John 3:1 states that the members of the Johannine community, as children of God the Father, remain unknown to the world because the Son of God was unknown to the world.[316] The world therefore likewise does not know God the Father. This argument stands parallel to that made by Jesus in the Gospel (John 14:7). First John 3:13 takes this argument further, that not only do the children of God remain unknown to the world, but the world hates them. This text too parallels an argument made by Christ in the Gospel (John 15:18–19).[317] "The world," then, is not only a malign influence but an enemy to the community.

First John 3:17 offers another perspective on the things of the world. "The pride of life" listed as one of the things of the world in 2:16 refers to the arrogance or boasting in βίον,[318] the same word used to describe the world's goods in 3:17. In addition to being simply translatable as "life," βίον can also indicate wealth, property, or possessions.[319] Certainly, boasting in

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[315] Brown, *Epistles*, 326.

[316] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 176.

[317] Brown, *Epistles*, 471.

[318] LSJ, s.v. "βίον."

[319] Olsson, *Letters*, 136–137.

possessions is one definition of loving the things of the world.[320] While loving these things marks a person out as being of the world and apart from God, the love of them is not the mere possession of them. First John 3:17 presents the possibility that these possessions, these things in the world, can be used to show love through sharing them with those in need.[321]

First John 4:1–5 introduces the concept of a spiritual power in the world which is opposed to Christ. This spirit goes abroad in the world and is moving and speaking through false prophets and antichrists.[322] First John 5:19 describes the whole world as lying under the power of the evil one. The evil one is in control of the world, and it is his spirit that goes abroad in the world.[323] These human agents, which include the secessionists who do not confess Jesus as the Messiah, are at home in the world because they are following its master.[324] Here too, however, the world is conceived of spatially, as the spirit of antichrist and the false prophets have come into it, and dwell within it. While the Spirit of God dwells within the Johannine community, the evil spirit dwells outside of it in the world.

Second John 7 mirrors this language, the sole usage of "the world" in that epistle.[325] Many deceivers have come into the world. They can be identified by their refusal to confess Jesus as the Messiah come in the flesh. The one who repudiates or will not make this confession is both "the deceiver" and "the antichrist." The world here is not the agent of corruption or the

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[320] Kruse, *Letters*, 96.

[321] Brown, *Epistles*, 473–475.

[322] Kruse, *Letters*, 148.

[323] Stott, *Letters*, 105.

[324] Kruse, *Letters*, 115.

[325] Olsson, *Letters*, 52.

agent of hostility toward Christ or the community. Rather, it is the arena in which these deceivers and antichrists enact their corruption and hostility toward Christ and the community.[326]

It is not only, however, the spirit of antichrist which has come into the world. First John 4:9 states that God has sent his Son into the world. Here once again the world is regarded in spatial terms as a space containing people and objects. God sent his Son to be the Savior of the world (4:14). His role as Savior means that the Son of God, Jesus, has entered the world to change its current state.[327] Further, 4:17 places the Johannine community itself in the world as space. Salvation then is not the removal of the community from the world, but rather a change in the world's state accomplished by the Son of God.[328]

This salvific change of state is described as a victory and as overcoming the world (1 John 5:4–5). It is faith, specifically the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, which grants victory in overcoming the world to the Johannine community.[329] This text also finds parallel in the Gospel. After Jesus has warned his disciples of the enmity they will face from the world, he consoles them with the knowledge that he has overcome the world (John 16:33).[330] "The world" in 1 John is the physical creation itself, the world as space and its contents. The physical world lies under the control of the evil one through his efforts by way of his agents in the world. Jesus has come into the world, the Son of God, to defeat the evil one and overcome this corruption to save the world itself, not only the members of the Johannine community.

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[326] Brown, *Epistles*, 668.

[327] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 248.

[328] Brown, *Epistles*, 558.

[329] Brown, *Epistles*, 595.

[330] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 276.

E. The Interpretation of 1 John 2:2

The history of interpretation of 1 John 2:2 has moved through several distinct phases. Many of the major themes within this history relate to particular theological debates and threats to received orthodoxy in particular settings. The earliest interpretations of the text focus on the reality and nature of Christ's atonement as such. Focus then shifts to 1 John as a whole being a response to the dangers of schism. In the medieval period, 1 John 2:2 is interpreted over against its use in support of universal salvation. Another interpretive shift occurs in the Reformation period as opponents deployed this text against views of particular atonement within Reformed Dogmatics. Though this emphasis has continued into the modern period, modern scholarship has manifested a far greater variety of interpretations of this text and its role in the argument of 1 John.

1. Early Interpretation

The text of 1 John was the subject of extremely early citation and interpretation. Although the text of his usage of 1 John has not survived, it was used by Papias (95–110 CE) according to Eusebius of Caesarea.[331] Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 110–140 CE) appears to cite 1 John 4:2–3, though he does not attribute it as a citation of any particular work.[332] Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 CE) composed a full commentary on his received collection of the general epistles which is

[331] *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.17.

[332] *Philippians*, 7.1.

known to have included 1 John, though this full commentary is lost to history.[333] Justin Martyr (c. 150–160 CE) also references 1 John, alluding to 2:3 and 3:1.[334] Clement's successor in Alexandria, Origen, was aware of 1 John and referenced it, identifying its authorship with that of John's Gospel and made extensive use of its material in his commentary on the Gospel.[335] Also in Alexandria, Dionysius composed a full commentary on the Epistle.[336]

Origen made extensive use of 1 John 2:2, as well as 4:10, in his *Commentary on John* to describe the contours of Christ's atonement within the Gospel.[337] Most early references to 1 John 2:2 focus on identifying Christ as the atoning sacrifice for sin rather than on the nature of "the world" as the arena of atonement in 2:2d.[338] In the early fifth century, Hilary of Arles addressed himself to the scope of "the whole world" in his *Introductory Commentary on 1 John*.[339] Hilary understands "the whole world" as referring to "the whole church." Bede agrees that "the whole world" refers to the church universal.[340] He sees the thrust of this reference as being a rebuke to sectarian groups such as the fourth century Donatists who saw their particular local church within Africa as the totality of the church of Christ.

Without regard to whether or not this may be an apt application of the text of 1 John 2:2, it is impossible to conceive of this understanding as the understanding of the author of the Epistle

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[333] David R. Nienhuis and Robert W. Wall, *Reading the Epistles of James, Peter, John & Jude as Scripture: The Shaping & Shape of a Canonical Collection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 173.

[334] *Dialogue*, 123.9.

[335] Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 14.

[336] Brown, *Epistles*, 11.

[337] Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, 14.

[338] Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Adumbrations*, 3.89 and the aforementioned usage by Origen.

[339] *PL Supp*., 3.118.

[340] *PL*, 93.90.

or the understanding of the Johannine community which received it. It requires a conception of the church universal as opposed to local communities which lay at least a century in the future at the time of 1 John's composition.[341] It would also seem to require that the non-secessionist party of the Johannine community for some reason believed itself to be the totality of the church and was, therefore, being corrected by John. There is nothing to suggest this within the text of the Epistle nor any portion of the Epistle's argument which would naturally include this point.

When Calvin addressed himself to 1 John 2:2, he addressed what had become an area of concern within medieval scholasticism.[342] First John 2:2 was among a group of texts used by proponents of not only universalism but also of *apokatastasis*.[343] This danger had been recognized from at least the time of Peter Lombard in the twelfth century. Lombard had offered a solution to this problem using 1 John 2:2 as its basis. He distinguished between the sufficiency of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, which extended to the whole of humanity, and the efficiency of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, which extended only to the elect of all ages.[344]

By Calvin's time, the distinction between sufficiency and efficiency had become stereotyped in Latin theology. He accepts this distinction but does not see this as the correct interpretation of the text within the Epistle. It is difficult at best to conceive that either the faithful party within the Johannine community or the secessionist party held to some view of the atonement ten centuries before Lombard to which Lombard's distinction would be germane to

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[341] Brown, *Epistles*, 103f.

[342] *Comm*. 1 John. 2:2, CO 55.310.

[343] Apokatastasis is the view commonly attributed from the fourth century following to Origen that not only would all human persons find salvation but also that the devil and demons would even be reconciled to God in the eschatological state.

[344] W. Robert Godfrey, "Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 136.

the argument of the Epistle. Rather, Calvin returns to the interpretation taken by Hilary and Bede that this is a reference to the universal rather than local church.[345] Nonetheless, the primary usage and citation of 1 John 2:2 remained within the context of the extent of the atonement. Within Reformed thought, the difficulty presented by the text of 1 John 2:2 shifted from its usage to support ideas of apokatastasis to its usage against concepts of particular atonement necessitated by theories of penal substitution and election.[346]

2. Modern Interpretation

Brown addresses the potential that the distinction made in 1 John 2:2cd bears some relationship to the secessionist position.[347] He takes for granted that 2:2cd is addressing a restriction of the efficacy of the atonement and therefore concludes that this issue, in particular, cannot have a direct connection to the views of the opponents seceding from the Johannine community. Rather, Brown conjectures that perhaps the secessionists denied the idea of atonement *in toto* as the term used in 2:2 and 4:10 occurs nowhere within John's Gospel.[348] Brown considers the addition of the pronoun to form the phrase "those of the whole world" to be unnecessary. He comments that this brings into parallel "our sins" and "the whole world" which represents an uneven parallel. Brown resolves this dilemma by understanding "the whole world"

[345] *Comm*. 1 John. 2:2, CO 55.310.

[346] Godfrey, "Extent," 141–145.

[347] Brown, *Letters*, 222.

[348] Brown, *Letters*, 222.

as representing all of the people of the world. Christ's atoning sacrifice would then be an offering for the sins of the Johannine community and all of the people in the world.[349]

Brown sees the relevance of the Day of Atonement ritual to the understanding of atonement in 1 John despite not characterizing the Johannine community in exclusively, or even primarily, Jewish terms.[350] Brown also acknowledges the understanding within Second Temple Judaism that the world is under the influence or control of a hostile spiritual power, though he makes no connection to Azazel within the Day of Atonement ritual as such.[351] Rather, Brown parallels atonement for "our sins" and for "the whole world" with the high priest's offering "for himself and his house" and "for all the people."[352]

This understanding of 1 John 2:2 opens possibilities regarding the idea that the Johannine community might bear a mediatorial role in relation to the people of the world as a whole. If "our sins" represents the purification of the community in parallel to the purification of the high priest, this purification would be a precursor allowing for an atoning offering for all of the people. This conception is impossible to integrate with the argument of the Epistle as a whole. A mediatorial and high priestly role in the Epistle, particularly in 1 John 2:1–2, is ascribed only to Christ himself. Further, nothing in the rhetoric of 1 John directed toward the secessionist party

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[349] Brown, *Letters*, 222.

[350] Brown sees the Johannine community by the time of the composition of the First Epistle as having come to be predominated by a second wave of Christian converts with a high Christology. This group saw itself as being in conflict with "the Jews" as a defining characteristic of its identity. Brown, *Community*, 40–43.

[351] Brown, *Epistles*, 222–223.

[352] This would bring 1 John 2:2 into parallel with Hebrews 5:3, though Brown's view here sees this parallel in a fundamentally different light. Hebrews focuses on Christ's lack of need to offer atonement for himself, while Brown's interpretation of 1 John instead describes two groups of people for whom Christ makes atoning sacrifice. Brown therefore emphasizes that the offering was for the high priest and his house and then for the people. Brown, *Epistles*, 224.

suggests any intent to mediate on their behalf. Quite the opposite is true (1 John 5:16). Brown does not pursue this particular line of inquiry.

Brown sees 1 John 2:2 as the climax of the argument begun in 1:5. He structures his treatment of this portion of the text around the conditional statements in 1:6–10 regarding the reality of sin.[353] The text of 2:2 then serves as a reassurance in the face of the acknowledgment of sin within the community for which John has been arguing that Christ serves as an atoning sacrifice for acknowledged sin.[354] Viewing 2:2ab as such a reassurance renders the distinction of 2:2cd an aside, additional information regarding Christ's atonement for "the whole world" that is not a part of the preceding argument, nor what follows.

Yarbrough sees in 1 John 2:2 the principle, within the concept of atonement, of an offering necessary to allow humanity to draw near to God in worship.[355] He also distinguishes sharply between expiation and propitiation. Though the latter can include the former, scholars often assert the former as an independent and sufficient explanation for the meaning of atonement. Yarbrough is eager to maintain a connection to penal substitutionary atonement in this text and therefore a sense of propitiation.[356] He is supported in this by Smalley[357] and Strecker.[358] Yarbrough sees the wrath of God which is propitiated by Christ's sacrifice as eschatological, that is, directly related to eternal punishment on the last day.[359]

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[353] Brown, *Letters*, 231–237.

[354] Brown, *Letters*, 242.

[355] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 77.

[356] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 77–78.

[357] Smalley, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 40.

[358] Strecker, *Letters*, 39.

[359] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 78.

The eschatological character of God's wrath logically leads Yarbrough to a dilemma regarding 1 John 2:2d. He explicitly denies that this text is intended to say that all people are rescued from eternal punishment by the sacrifice of Christ.[360] Yarbrough first parallels the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the whole world with the sacrificial offerings being made for all of Israel, despite much of Israel being persistently apostate. While he does appeal briefly to the distinction between sufficiency and efficiency, Yarbrough goes on to make a positive argument regarding the effect of this offering upon those for whom it is not, properly speaking, efficient in salvation from eschatological wrath. He posits Christ's atoning sacrifice as the basis for God's patience and longsuffering with regard to sin throughout all ages. Though not all people will be delivered ultimately from eschatological wrath, that wrath is postponed even for them until the eschaton.[361] Christ's atoning sacrifice, understood in this way, is the basis for Yarbrough's understanding of common grace. [362]

Yarbrough understands 1 John 2:1–2 not as the climax of the preceding section, but as the introduction of a succeeding section. He sees 2:1–2 as describing a twofold ministry of Christ as intercessor and offeror of sacrifice.[363] Christ's ministry then forms the basis of the assurance available to the believer argued for in 2:3–6. Understanding 2:1–2 in this way again means that for Yarbrough, the comment regarding "also the whole world" is parenthetical or an aside. First John 2:1–2 is not a statement relevant to the believers within the Johannine community, but a statement regarding those outside of it. Yarbrough's understanding of this aside, again, does not

[360] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 79.

[361] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 79–80.

[362] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 81.

[363] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 70.

seem to fit with the overall argument of the Epistle, which makes no positive statement about those outside of the community. Quite the opposite. The overall thrust of the argument against the opponents is that to leave the community is to cut one's self off from God, not to receive only some subsidiary benefits. Additionally, while God's longsuffering toward human sin in general, and the sins of those outside of the covenant community in particular, is a theme in many New Testament texts,[364] it does not seem to appear as a theme in 1 John.

Stott's commentary on 1 John 2:2 focuses almost entirely on defending a Christian understanding of propitiation against proponents of expiation alone as the understanding of offerings of atonement.[365] He uses the text as an opportunity for a brief excursus on propitiation in scripture as such.[366] Stott emphasizes that 2:2 depicts Christ as both the offeror and the offering, with the latter being of special importance.[367] For Stott it is God himself who propitiates himself, allowing for the freedom of human persons from his wrath. With this defined, however, Stott devotes relatively little attention to how Christ is the propitiatory offering for the whole world, merely paraphrasing the distinction between sufficiency and efficiency.[368] His use of this distinction raises the question of how God's wrath can be potentially satisfied for all people and then at some point in time become appeased by a sacrifice offered once and in past time to the appeasement. This issue of particular or general atonement is not here directly addressed by Stott.

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[364] Cf. 2 Pet 3:8–9; Rom 1:18–20; Acts 17:30. Yarbrough cites the last of these in this context. Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 79.

[365] Stott, *Letters*, 87.

[366] Stott, *Letters*, 89–92.

[367] Stott, *Letters*, 88.

[368] Stott, *Letters*, 88.

Marshall also focuses his commentary on 1 John 2:2 on the debate over the propriety of incorporating an understanding of propitiation into the nature of Christ's atoning sacrifice.[369] He attributes the primary motivation of the dispute to Westcott and Dodd. Both scholars argued that propitiation, at least as understood in the pagan world, is incompatible with God as presented in both Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament texts. The barrier to divine-human communion is sin itself, not the wrath of God toward it as such, and therefore the solution is merely for the sin to be removed.[370] Leon Morris, among others, countered this argument by arguing for a Christian view of propitiation distinguished from the pagan view at significant points.[371] Marshall himself sees propitiation and expiation as compatible and, indeed, inseparable.[372]

Concerning the significance of atonement for "the whole world," Marshall understands this to be a statement of Christ's sacrifice as the exclusive means of fellowship with God.[373] While this is fully in keeping with the overall argument of 1 John, it is not clear how this statement of Christ's exclusivity would function within the syntax of 2:2. The statement that Christ is himself the atoning sacrifice for sin would seem sufficient to point to the importance of Christ. Marshall's understanding of "the whole world" would make sense within this "not only, but also" structure only as a counterpoint to a sort of pluralistic view which posited many means to fellowship with God. None of the proposed backgrounds of the Epistle, or hypotheses regarding the Johannine opponents, depicts a group with such a view. Marshall's proposed

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[369] Marshall, *Epistles*, 117–120.

[370] Westcott, *Epistles*, 85–87.

[371] Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 114–213.

[372] Marshall, *Epistles*, 118.

[373] Marshall, *Epistles*, 119–120.

opponents, a proto-Gnostic sect similar to that of Cerinthus or Basilides, did not posit a multitude of ways to fellowship with God, but rather that only they had truly found it.[374]

Jobes' interpretation of "the whole world" is likewise that it points to the exclusivity of salvation in Christ.[375] It suffers the same difficulty in this regard as Marshall's approach. Jobes, however, distinguishes between Christus Victor models of the atonement, propitiation, and the Johannine corpus which presents Christ's sacrifice as "a replacement for animal sacrifice in the temple."[376] This understanding of replacement is particularly apparent in the parallel with John 1:36, which identifies Christ as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Unlike Marshall, Jobes sees Christ's sacrifice in 1 John 2:2 purely in terms of expiation.

Kruse also uses 1 John 2:2 as an opportunity for an excursus on atonement.[377] After briefly recounting the dispute between Dodd and Morris, Kruse also sees propitiation and expiation as related aspects of atonement in the Old Testament. Regarding the meaning of atonement for "the whole world," Kruse emends the text to "the sins of the whole world."[378] After making this emendation, he does not have a working theory as to the meaning of the phrase. First John 5:11–13 denies the extension of eternal life to all people. He ultimately mentions the distinction between sufficiency and efficiency as a suggestive possibility.[379]

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[374] Marshall, *Epistles*, 21–22.

[375] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 80.

[376] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 79.

[377] Kruse, *Letters*, 75–76.

[378] Kruse, *Letters*, 74.

[379] Kruse, *Letters*, 75.

Olsson sees atonement in 1 John 2:2 purely in terms of expiation.[380] He sees 2:2 as the end of a textual division which begins at 1:5.[381] While 2:2 is the climax of this argument, Olsson sees the central theme of forgiveness as the primary focus of the section, with Christ's expiatory offering merely being stated as the means.[382] In interpreting "the whole world" in this text, Olsson refers to Christ's sacrifice extending to "all humanity" with no further elaboration of the meaning of this distinction.[383] While Olsson interprets the forgiveness theme of this section of the Epistle in light of the intra-Jewish hypothesis, he does little with 2:2 in this regard beyond suggesting a connection to the Day of Atonement ritual which he does not elaborate.[384]

Lieu also sees 1 John 2:2 as the culmination of the section from 1:5–2:2. The idea that atonement here has a cultic significance, referring to sacrifice, is dismissed due to the relevant text in Lev 25:9 speaking of the offering of the Day of Atonement "concerning sin" in the singular rather than plural.[385] Lieu associates a "sacrificial context" with propitiation, which she here rejects in favor of translating "atonement" as "forgiveness." Against the background of a version of the intra-Jewish hypothesis, Lieu then goes on, however, to propose Is 52:13–53:11 as a background to this section of 1 John. She makes this proposal even though in 53:10, just as in Lev 25:9, the death of the Suffering Servant is "concerning sin" in the singular.[386]

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[380] Expiation is the subject of one of his appendices. Olsson, *Letters*, 300–303.

[381] Olsson, *Letters*, 88–89.

[382] Olsson, *Letters*, 105.

[383] Olsson, *Letters*, 94, 104.

[384] Olsson, *Letters*, 302.

[385] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 64.

[386] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 64.

In addressing the meaning of "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2d, Lieu sees "the world," though used in various ways in the Epistle, in tandem with 4:14 which identifies Jesus as the "savior of the world."[387] Lieu designates these as the two positive uses of the term "world" within the Epistle. She characterizes the other references to the world as "negative." Beyond this, she posits an enmity within the Epistle between the world and God.[388] Lieu, therefore, sees the extent of Christ's atoning sacrifice to the whole world as referring to the potential for it to become efficacious for all people. Far from a statement of universal salvation, Lieu sees this potential as a "slender thread" of hope.[389]

From this overview of the history of interpretation of 1 John 2:2, several clear themes emerge. First, it is rare that an interpreter understands 1 John 2:2 through the lens of the interpreter's hypothesis regarding the Johannine opponents. In some cases, the interpretation taken of 1 John 2:2 would seem to directly contradict the proposed opponents against which the Epistle addresses itself. More often, the interpretation taken of 2:2 is irrelevant to the proposed opponents, sometimes even irrelevant to the overall argument of the Epistle as a whole into which interpreters do not seek to integrate it. These interpreters treat the text as an aside, particularly 2:2d.

Second, interpreters have predominately viewed 1 John 2:2 in the light of contemporary theological debates. Applying it to these contemporary debates began with its usage as a text against sectarian movements such as the Donatists. Later it became a problematic text in debating *apokatastasis*, leading to it becoming a text dealt with primarily concerning the extent

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[387] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 65.

[388] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 66.

[389] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 66.

of the atonement, its sufficiency as opposed to efficiency. In a more recent discussion, by representing one of the two uses of ἱλασμός in 1 John, and the New Testament as a whole, it has become a text embroiled in the debate regarding expiation and propitiation and their relative roles in sacrificial atonement. None of these debates, however, are relevant to the original intent of the text or its place in the overall argument of the Epistle.

Finally, interpreters occasionally mention elements of the Jewish background which underlies 1 John in relationship to 2:2, but they are not consistently or thoroughly applied. Nor are they used to integrate the text into the dispute with the secessionists or the overall argument of the Epistle. Brown mentions not only the Day of Atonement but also the Second Temple Jewish understanding of "the world" as lying under the control of hostile spiritual powers through their spread of corruption in his discussion of 2:2.[390] Lieu[391] and Olsson[392] both mention the Day of Atonement, the former particularly in a cultic ritual context, though she dismisses that possibility. Even in Olsson's case, this connection remains undeveloped. In light of intra-Jewish dispute which stands behind the text of the Epistle, these connections are primary in understanding the original intent of 1 John 2:2.

[390] Brown, *Epistles*, 221–223.

[391] Lieu, *I, II, and III John*, 64.

[392] Olsson, *Letters*, 302.

V. THE STRUCTURE OF 1 JOHN

In addition to the integration of 1 John 2:2 into the conflict with the secessionist opponents toward which the Epistle is directed, the text must also be integrated into its immediate context within the Epistle and the context of the argument of the Epistle as a whole. The history of interpretation of 1 John 2:2 reflects a failure to explain the connection between its argument and the dispute with the opponents because interpreters have not considered it an "opponents" text. It likewise reflects a failure to relate the argument of 2:2 with the argument of the section of the Epistle in which it lies. The argument of this text is centered around the distinction "not only, but also." The apodosis of this argument is treated commonly as an aside.[393] Whatever is meant by "the whole world" is not taken to be a plank in the overall argument but a comment during that argument.

The structure of 1 John is most commonly described in outline form. This description of the structure of the Epistle divides the text into discrete units. It then describes these units in terms of argument and theme. This description then rearranges the units under subheadings. The overall argument of 1 John is then described by being traced through these subheadings and the themes of these textual units. Such outlines typically place 1 John 2:2 in one of two positions, both maintaining its connection to 2:1. Either they see this text as concluding a

[393] As by interpreters as diverse as Brown, Yarbrough, Marshall, and Olsson.

textual unit running from 1:5–2:2 or as beginning a new textual unit running from 2:1–6. Either positioning then leads to the question of the integration of 2:2 into that textual unit as the beginning or as the climax.

Alternatively, 1 John can have its structure described as a cyclical pattern rather than the traditional outline format.[394] Within this cyclical structure, themes are introduced early in the text of the Epistle and then returned to reciprocally and developed throughout the text. The structure is sometimes described as a "spiral" or an "inverted cone" to convey both the cyclical pattern and the gradual advance of the overall argument. Interpreting 1 John 2:2 in light of such a structure required not its integration into a defined textual unit composed of its immediate surroundings but rather connecting it to one or more of the thematic threads running through the text of the Epistle.

A. First John 2:2 in its Textual Environs

First John 2:2 is closely linked with the preceding verse 2:1. These texts function as a single thought unit which describes the high priestly function of Christ. The role of the high priest was twofold. First, the high priest served as an intercessor for the people before God. Second, the high priest was the chief offeror of sacrifices, specifically atoning sacrifices.[395] The performance of the rituals of the Day of Atonement was the high priest's unique role. First John 2:1 describes

[394] Something similar to this structure has been proposed for John's Gospel. For example, Keener sees recurring motifs developed throughout the Gospel's text. *Gospel*, 233. Such a cyclical pattern is also a common means of describing the structure of Revelation. Kevin W. Larsen, "Neglected Considerations in Understanding the Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Restoration Quarterly* 59 (2017): 225–227.

[395] Olsson, *Letters*, 104.

Christ as an intercessor,[396] or more strongly an advocate before God the Father on behalf of the sins of the Johannine community. First John 2:2 portrays Christ as not only the offeror of sacrifice but as the sacrificial offering himself. This portrayal gives Christ's atoning sacrifice the unique character of a self-offering.[397]

This connection of 2:1–2 as textual unit serves to strengthen the connection of the sacrifice offered in 2:2 to the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement in particular. Christ serves as an advocate before the Father for the community member who sins. He is himself the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the community and the whole world. This intersection between intercession for sin and offering for sin and its resultant contamination is uniquely the role of the high priest on the Day of Atonement.[398] This sacrifice was not an abstract concept of atonement or a theory thereof, but rather a recent reality. It is a real possibility that the final instances of the practice of this ritual took place within the lifetime of members of the community.[399] Certainly, it was a reality within the community itself through the scriptures and other Jewish writings which formed the basis of community life. Their authoritative use in 1 John attests to this authority of the Hebrew Scriptures and later traditions within the community.[400]

Outlines of the structure of 1 John incorporate 2:1–2 into a larger, surrounding textual unit. These delineations are descriptive rather than prescriptive. There is no suggestion that these outlines represent a recovered outline or plan which lies beneath the text of 1 John. Rather, they

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[396] παράκλητος

[397] This identification of the ministry of Christ in relation to the community as that of the high priest is merely referenced here. It is developed in rich detail in Hebrews 4:14–5:10.

[398] Brown, *Epistles*, 217.

[399] This is true even if the Epistle be dated as late as the first quarter of the second century CE. It includes the author.

[400] Olsson, *Letters*, 166.

describe the function which 1 John 2:1–2 performs within the structure of the immediate argument of 1 John 1 and 2. The insights gained from these structural discussions are therefore not mutually exclusive. First John 2:1–2 can function as both the climax of the argument from 1:5–2:2 and as the beginning of a new unit of argument running from 2:1–6. To suggest that both of these characterizations of the text are valid is to say that 1 John 2:1–2 serves as a pivot in the overall argument of the two chapters.

1. First John 2:1–2 as Climax of 1:5–2:2

Structural features within the section of the text from 1 John 1:5–2:2 make a strong case for seeing 2:1–2 as the climax of the unit. After the summary statement of the gospel in 1:5, the section is structured around three repetitions of a single argument structure.[401] The argument presents a series of three potential boasts, the consequences of those boasts, and a potential remedy for those consequences.[402] This argument follows the structure "if we say [boast]…[then] we…but if we…then."[403] This pattern repeats itself in 1:6–7, 1:8–9, and 1:10–2:2.[404]

In addition to this repetition, there is an increase in specificity and clarity across the three units of text. The gospel summary of 1:5 speaks in terms of light and darkness.[405] The first unit,

[401] The statement of 1:5 serves as a summary and restatement, perhaps even the climax, of the previous textual unit while also introducing the new unit from 1:5–2:2. Olsson, *Letters*, 94.

[402] Stott, *Letters*, 77–78.

[403] Olsson, *Letters*, 95.

[404] Brown, *Epistles*, 191.

[405] Kruse, *Letters*, 61–62.

1:6–7 then applies this statement regarding the nature of God by stating that a profession of communion with God that is accompanied by walking in darkness is a false profession. Walking in the light, however, is presented as an alternative which creates a communion with one another and brings about the cleansing of sin through the blood of Jesus. The unit 1:8–9 then develops the cleansing of sin introduced in 1:7. A profession of sinlessness is a false profession. Confession of sin, however, brings about forgiveness and cleansing. The final repetition, 1:10–2:2, again presents a profession of sinlessness as a false profession. The reality of sin, however, is countered by the intercessions of Jesus Christ and his self-offering as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the community and the whole world.[406]

First John 2:1–2 serving as the climax of this pattern of argument serves to parallel this text with 1:7 and 1:9. These verses further define and describe the meaning of Christ serving as an atoning sacrifice for "our sins."[407] Communion with God constitutes the Johannine community (1:7), which defines the "us" of 1:9 and 2:2.[408] The function of Christ's sacrifice concerning the sins of the community is then further defined as the forgiveness of sins (1:9) and cleansing from sin and unrighteousness (1:7, 9). The additional distinction and argument of 1 John 2:2, that Christ's atoning sacrifice is also for "the whole world" is a new conceptual element introduced at the climax of the section.

The cleansing described by 1 John 1:7 is specifically a cleansing or purification accomplished with Christ's blood.[409] The use of his blood is in keeping with the identification in

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[406] Brown, *Epistles*, 231, 237.

[407] Marshall, *Epistles*, 112.

[408] Brown, *Epistles*, 201.

[409] Olsson, *Letters*, 101–102.

2:2 of Christ himself as the atoning sacrifice, not only the offeror of sacrifice.[410] In addition to the specific identification in 2:2 that Christ's sacrifice is an atoning sacrifice, this paralleled reference to cleansing with blood connects the text to the Day of Atonement ritual as such.[411] However the distinction introduced in 2:2, extending the cleansing of Christ's atoning sacrifice from "our sins" (1:9) to "the whole world," is understood, it must be understood alongside John's portrayal of Christ's sacrifice within the Day of Atonement ritual. The dual nature of Christ's atonement in 1 John 2:2 ought to find a parallel in that ritual.

2. First John 2:1–2 as Introduction to 2:1–6

The structure of paralleled repetition in 1 John 1:5–2:2 is a strong argument for its delineation as a literary unit. There are also, however, clear connections within the unit of 2:1–6.[412] The third and final unit of argument in the preceding section posits Christ as an atoning sacrifice for our sins as the resolution of the dilemma created by the awareness of our sin. First John 2:3–6 then further defines the basis of this reassurance. John has argued that the one who walks in darkness has no part of God and that the one who has had his sins forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ will walk in the light. First John 2:3–6 further describes how the one who sins can know that he is not walking in darkness but is the recipient of this forgiveness and cleansing.[413]

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[410] Kruse, *Letters*, 73–74.

[411] As Brown points out, in both Israelite sacrificial ritual generally and the Day of Atonement ritual in particular, the act of killing per se is not the primary focus. Rather, the killing of the animal is a necessary precursor to the offering of portions of the animal sacrificially. In the Day of Atonement ritual, it is a precursor to the retrieval of the blood of the animal for its use in the purification of the sanctuary. Brown, *Epistles*, 202.

[412] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 70.

[413] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 70.

The transition in 1 John 2:1 to the beginning of a new textual unit is marked by the use of the vocative address, "my children."[414] This direct address to the recipients of the Epistle as the author's children occurs repeatedly and serves as a structural marker within the discourse of 1 John.[415] Another vocative address, "beloved," is likewise used as a structural marker within the text. This latter address appears in 2:7 initiating a new unit.[416] First John 2:3–6 features the repetition of a twofold argument structure. The argument structure "this is how we know…the ones who say" occurs in both 2:3–4 and 2:5–6.[417] The first instance of this pattern expresses the negative case that a profession without the keeping of commandments is a false profession. The second instance represents the positive case, that the one whose profession is accompanied by walking as Christ walked can have the assurance of the love of God.

The textual unit of 1 John 1:5–9 describes two conditions which falsify a profession of Christ. Each is followed by a means of reassurance which demonstrates the validity of that profession. First John 1:10–2:2 represents a third such condition with the atoning sacrifice of Christ himself, both as offeror and self-offered as the means of reassurance in the face of sin by members of the Johannine community. First John 2:3–6 then presents two conditions which serve to falsify or validate the belief by community members that they are "in Christ," i.e., that the atoning sacrifice of Christ does indeed purify them of their sins.[418] This extended conditionality has direct consequences regarding possible understandings of the meaning of "the

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[414] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 76.

[415] "My children" appears first in 2:1, then again in 2:12, 18, 28; 3:1, 7, 18; 4:4; 5:21.

[416] "Beloved" appears first in 2:7, then again in 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11. It also serves a similar structural function in 3 John 2, 5, 11.

[417] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 76–77.

[418] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 81–82.

whole world" in 2:2d. Specifically, the extension of Christ's atoning sacrifice to "the whole world" cannot imply that the sins of every person in the world are forgiven and cleansed functionally by Christ's sacrifice. In such a case, no such conditionality would continue to exist.

First John 2:1–2 is a pivot point between the preceding textual unit, 1:5–10, and the subsequent unit, 2:3–6. It stands at the center of two sets of two conditional statements the focus of which is to validate or invalidate a profession of communion with God through Jesus Christ. The atoning sacrifice of Christ is both the means of cleansing of the members of the Johannine community from their sins and how they can walk in the light, which is to walk in the way in which Christ himself walked (2:6).[419] This theme recurs later in the text of 1 John.

B. First John 2:2 in the Text of 1 John

In addressing the overall structure of the Epistle, several scholars have suggested that it be understood not in terms of a traditional outline as in a book with chapters and subheadings. Nor is it best described in terms of a single movement of argument from start to finish as a narrative. Rather, they understand the structure of 1 John as a whole as a cyclical pattern. Within the Epistle, there are particular moments of the argument which are isolatable and able to be expressed in summary as principles. While elaborating these principles, the Epistle introduces concepts which are then developed later in the text. Later portions of the text return to concepts already developed to tie them together with the ideas being developed in those later portions of the text.

[419] Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, 86–88.

Though Jobes utilizes a traditional outline for describing the structure of the Epistle as a whole as well as the smaller textual units which compose it, she admits that this is difficult due to the cyclical pattern of the Epistle's text. The Epistle intertwines the three themes of sin, love, and the person of Jesus Christ throughout. Not merely three threads comingled, it continually develops these themes. The text develops each in turn and develops them particularly in light of what it argues concerning the other two.[420] As but one example, the two references to atonement in 1 John attach themselves to these themes. In 2:2, atonement is connected to human sin. In 4:10, Christ serves as an atoning sacrifice as the ultimate example of divine love. These should not be understood as differing usages or unrelated arguments but rather as the development of ideas and a central argument through the text of the Epistle as a whole.[421]

While several proposed outlines of 1 John can be generally described as cyclical, this organization is not a flat series of circles but rather a spiral. As the thematic cycle repeats, the development of each theme deepens.[422] Law sees the text of the Epistle as consisting of three cycles. These cycles describe the themes of righteousness, love, and belief. These three themes are dealt with in turn in the first two cycles and then intertwined and brought to fruition in the final cycle which concludes the text (4:7–5:21).[423] Law's structural outline of the Epistle places 1 John 2:1–2 at the center of the first cycle's discussion of the theme of righteousness (1:8–2:6). The second cycle's discussion of righteousness parallels this discussion (2:29–3:10a). The parallel structure of these textual units places 1 John 2:2's argument that Christ's atonement is

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[420] Jobes, *1, 2, &3 John*, 38.

[421] Brown, *Epistles*, 519.

[422] Marshall, *Epistles*, 22.

[423] Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: T. Clark, 1909), 1–24.

not only for the sins of the Johannine community but also for the world in parallel to 3:8. The Son of God's purpose in coming is to offer himself as an atoning sacrifice and to destroy the works of the devil.[424]

Brooke also describes the structure of 1 John as a whole in terms of a cyclical pattern. In his analysis, however, rather than repetitive thematic cycles, the Epistle is structured around a series of theses concerning certain themes developed in turn. The themes developed using these theses are then intertwined in the final portion of the Epistle (4:7–5:12).[425] Brooke identifies two primary themes, ethical and Christological material. Theses are elaborated and argued from each of these themes. Finally, they are brought together under the terms of love and faith respectively. Brooke places 1 John 2:2 in the center of the delineation of John's first ethical thesis (1:5–2:17). As in Law's outline of the cycles which structure the Epistle, this brings the text into parallel with 3:8, which Brooke places in the center of the discussion of the second ethical thesis (2:28–3:24). Once again, these structural considerations draw together the idea of the destruction of the works of the devil with the concept of Christ's self-offering as an atonement.[426]

Lenski argues for a similar but far more complex structure. Typical attempts to divide 1 John into a standard outline structure remain unconvincing because they fail to account for the constant repetitions and reiterations throughout the text of the Epistle.[427] Rather than cycles or a repeated pattern of two or three themes, Lenski sees a variety of themes running through the text of the Epistle. These themes include light and darkness, truth and lies, the forgiveness of sins, the

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[424] Law, *First Epistle*, 158.

[425] A.E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1912), xxxii–xxxviii.

[426] Brooke, *Epistles*, 88–89.

[427] Lenski, *Interpretation*, 365.

identification of Jesus as the Son of God, blood atonement, the keeping of commandments, and most significantly, love. Lenski sees the "opponents" passages as one of these interwoven themes.[428]

Rather than a spiral, Lenski describes the structure of 1 John as an inverted pyramid or cone.[429] This structure is inverted because the beginning of the Epistle represents the apex rather than the base of the figure in this analogy. The text moves from this apex in an inverted cone pattern until it fully elaborates the various themes.[430] Lenski sees the rather abrupt ending of the Epistle, "keep yourselves from idols," as a sort of tail at the end of the spiral, a final note. That it seems merely appended to the text rather than as a functional climax, he takes as further evidence of this inverted structure.[431] The complexity observed by Lenski does not neatly parallel individual portions of the text of the Epistle with other portions of the text. Rather it sees any given text as connected to a thread which runs through the text as a whole. These connections, then, must be traced in greater detail.

There are other variations of this structural breakdown for 1 John which likewise focus on the complexity of the patterns which delineate and unify the text. Moberly, for example, argues that the Epistle should not be outlined based on the idea of a sequential logical argument. Rather, he sees 1 John as similar to a musical piece with recurring variations on a theme which develop over its course.[432] Marshall is a noted critic of these approaches, ultimately finding all

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[428] Lenski, *Interpretation*, 365–366.

[429] Lenski, *Interpretation*, 366.

[430] Lenski, *Interpretation*, 367.

[431] Lenski, *Interpretation*, 366.

[432] R.W.L. Moberly, "'Test the Spirits': God, Love, and Critical Discernment in 1 John 4," In *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 298.

such suggested structures for the Epistle unconvincing. He favors, rather, a more traditional breakdown despite its difficulty.[433]

C. First John 2:2 and the Themes of 1 John

Its place within the structure of 1 John as a whole and its immediate textual environs serve to connect Christ's atoning work as described in 1 John 2:2 with other themes within the Epistle. These thematic connections serve to develop the understanding of atonement further as described in 2:2. Setting these themes as a developed whole against the background of an intra-Jewish dispute within the Johannine community, the meaning of John's argument in 2:2 becomes clear. Specifically, the meaning of the distinction that Christ is an atonement for not only "our sins" but for "the whole world" becomes clear within the context of the understanding of the "the whole world" used by the Epistle as a whole.

There is one text in 1 John beyond 2:2 which contains the phrase "the whole world." First John 5:19 makes a distinction between "we," the Johannine community, and the world. The first of these is from God. The relationship "from" is derived from the relationship of parentage between the community and God described in 5:18. The world, in contrast, lies under the power of the evil one. When followed, as here, with the preposition ἐν and dative of place, the verb κεῖμαι typically describes an infant or a deceased human body which lies in a particular place.[434]

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[433] Marshall's rejection of any kind of cyclical pattern, even the less complex forms described by Law and Brooke, is based in his difficulty in believing that any author would plan their material in that way. This reveals more concerning Marshall than concerning the structure of 1 John. That he and many other modern authors begin their work with a detailed outline of the material does not necessitate that an ancient author writing in a different literary genre must do the same. This is therefore less criticism than a failure of imagination. Marshall, *Epistles*, 22–23.

[434] LSJ, s.v. "κεῖμαι."

The conception of the power of the evil one here is in spatial terms. The sphere of influence of the evil one and his power is a position into which "the whole world" has been relegated. Second Macc 3:11 and 4:31, 34 use similar phrasing to communicate the idea of a state of being.[435] The Epistle contrasts the position of "the whole world" to that of those born of God, whom the evil one cannot touch in 1 John 5:18.

While both 1 John 2:2 and 5:19 refer to "the whole world" there is a slight difference in syntax. In 2:2, the adjective "whole" precedes the noun "world." In 5:19, the opposite is the case.[436] This difference in word order is not necessarily meaningful. In 1 John 2:2 the phrase is the object of a preposition and in the genitive case. In 5:19 it is the subject of a clause and in the nominative case. This difference in usage is sufficient to explain the difference in verbal form. Certain interpreters, however, have attempted to reflect this difference in translation, i.e., rendering 5:19 as "the world as a whole" rather than as "the whole world."[437] It is clear from the further argumentation of those making this distinction, however, that it is one necessitated by the commentator's interpretation of 2:2. If "the whole world" is taken to refer to all of the human persons in the world in 2:2, 5:19 represents a dilemma, as that reference does not work in the latter context. Interpreters have used the difference in word order as a means to interpret the two references in fundamentally different ways. The approach which argues that in a relatively short epistle John uses the same terminology in two different ways with only a slight variation in syntax to mark out the two usages might be tenable if it was the only alternative to explain the

[435] Brown, *Epistles*, 623.

[436] 2:2 reads "ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου." 5:19 reads "ὁ κόσμος ὅλος."

[437] Brooke, *Epistles*, 150; Westcott, *Epistles*, 195.

data. If, however, the two usages can be understood consistently, no special pleading is required.[438]

First John 5:19 is one of several references to "the evil one" in the Epistle. The others are 2:13–14 and 3:12. These references occur in the masculine and refer to a particular being.[439] "The evil one" is paralleled with the similar figure of "the devil" such that it is clear that John is using these titles to refer to the same being. The devil is referred to in 3:8 and 10. The devil, the evil one, is here presented as holding the whole world helpless.[440] In light of 1 John 2:2, the purification of their sins has delivered the Johannine community from this state of being. The atoning sacrifice of Christ has not only served this function for the community but is also an offering for the whole world.

First John 4:10 presents Christ's atoning sacrifice as being ultimately motivated by God's love.[441] In language mirroring 1 John 2:2, this text presents the purpose of God sending his son as his being the atoning sacrifice for "our sins."[442] First John 4:14 parallels this purpose with the statement that the Father sent his son to be the savior of the world. The phrase "savior of the world" occurs in only one other place in the New Testament, that being John 4:42.[443] The direction of God's love and the work of Christ toward not only the believing community but the world here in the Epistle represents the same theme expressed in the Gospel at John 3:16–17.[444]

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[438] Brown, *Epistles*, 623.

[439] Stott, *Letters*, 191.

[440] Stott, *Letters*, 191.

[441] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 238–239.

[442] Brown, *Epistles*, 519.

[443] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 248.

[444] Brown, *Epistles*, 523.

By positing that Christ is the savior of the world, 1 John describes this salvation in the context of the removal of the world from the power of the evil one.

The title "Savior" is applied to Christ frequently in the New Testament (Luke 1:47; 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph 5:23; Phil 3:20; 2 Tim 1:10; 2 Pet 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). This title is applied to the God of Israel or his agent repeatedly in the Hebrew Scriptures as well (2 Sam 22:3; 2 Kgs 13:5; Neh 9:27; Ps 17:7; 106:21; Is 19:20; 43:1, 3, 11; 45:14–15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8; Jer 14:8; Hos 13:4; Obad 1:21). Certain texts within the New Testament mirror this usage in applying the title "savior" to God (1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Jude 1:25). Titus applies the title to both God and Jesus Christ alternatingly (1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6). All of these usages but one identify God, Christ, or a divine agent as the savior of God's people, often directly related to the nation of Israel. John's use of the title with the world as its object is, therefore, a deliberate extension of Christ's work, for which he was sent by God the Father, beyond the Johannine "us." John 4:42 makes this clear by placing the title on the lips of Samaritans.[445] The one other exception in the New Testament, 1 Tim 4:10, is, like John, extending the realm of God's saving activity beyond the bounds of the believing community, albeit in a different sense.

First John 4:10 and 14 present a two-fold purpose for the Father sending his son into the world. Likewise, 1 John 3:5, 8 present a twofold reason for the appearance of the Son of God. In parallel to Christ's atonement for "our sins" (2:2; 4:10), 3:5 states that he appeared to take away sins.[446] First John 3:8 states a second reason for the Son of God's appearance as the destruction

[445] Brown, *Epistles*, 523.

[446] Existing textual variants in this verse are revelatory. Some manuscripts here emend the text to "our sins." Others emend it to "the sins of the world." There is broad-based agreement that the earliest and most reliable text reads simply "sins." These variants, however, reflect an early sense of the relationship between 3:5 and 2:2. Kruse, *Letters*, 119n.

of the works of the devil.[447] While the verb has occasionally been understood as referring to the "loosing" of the works of the devil, that the Son of God is destroying these works, has achieved a broad consensus.[448] As previously described, cyclical or spiral outlines of the Epistle as a whole bring these texts into direct parallel with 2:2. As 5:19 describes the whole world as lying under the power of the evil one, the subjection of the world to the devil has occurred through his works. The extension of Christ's atoning work to the whole world then consists, at least in part, in his destruction of the devil's works.

The characterization of the role of Christ in taking away sins represents another connection to the Day of Atonement ritual.[449] While elsewhere in 1 John the remedy of sin is described as the sacrificial blood of Christ providing cleansing or purification (1:7), in the context of 3:5 sins are taken away. These two sacrificial characterizations come together within the Day of Atonement ritual within the context of the two goats.[450] The high priest casts lots over the two goats (Lev 16:7–8). One is designated as being for the Lord and is sacrificed to use its blood to cleanse the sanctuary (16:15). The other has the sins of the people pronounced over it and is driven into the wilderness, taking these sins with them (16:10). The scapegoat can thus be said to take the sins away from the camp.

That Christ's taking away of sins is sacrificial is reaffirmed by the statement in 1 John 3:5 that Christ has no sin in himself.[451] Christ can take away sins because he has none as his own. His blamelessness and unblemished status qualify Christ to serve as an atoning sacrifice just as

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[447] Brown, *Epistles*, 419.

[448] Schnackenburg, *Epistles*, 174.

[449] Kruse, *Letters*, 119.

[450] Olsson, *Letters*, 302.

[451] Kruse, *Letters*, 119–120.

the sacrificial offerings for sin had always been taken from those animals which are without blemish.[452] The same verbal syntax occurs in John's Gospel which identifies Jesus as the lamb of God "who takes away the sins of the world" (1:29).

A final conceptual link is offered by 1 John 3:12. While those of the Johannine community are "from God," the world lies under the power of the evil one. The world is in this state because the world has become corrupted through the works of the devil. Cain is said, in 3:12, to be "from the evil one." Cain murdered his brother, polluting the ground with innocent blood (Gen 4:10–12). John, however, sees the cause of this act of fratricide not as his position as being "from the devil" but rather as the fact that Cain's works were evil.[453] It was the evil works, the sin which mastered Cain (Gen 4:7), which both caused him to commit murder and gave him the status of being "from the devil."[454]

The works of the devil through which the evil one gains dominion over the world come into the world through human agents of sin. The Johannine literature describes these human agents as being "from the devil" or "children of the devil" within the Johannine literature.[455] The concepts of the works of the devil and their agents as his children are brought together in the Gospel of John in 8:39–44. Jesus states that his opponents do "the works" of their father (8:41). He goes on to identify their father, to whom they belong, as the devil (8:44). John identifies those to whom Jesus speaks these words as Jews who had at one point believed in him but now sought to kill him.[456] The opponents of Jesus parallel the opponents seceding from the Johannine

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[452] Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 186.

[453] Kruse, *Letters*, 333–334.

[454] Olsson, *Letters*, 330.

[455] Olsson, *Letters*, 330.

[456] Brown, *Epistles*, 406.

community under the intra-Jewish hypothesis.[457] Second John 11 and 3 John 10 identify these opponents with evil works.[458]

When the thematic threads in 1 John connected to 1 John 2:2 are drawn out, they create a conceptual web within which to understand the argument of 2:2. First John presents the world as space as well as its contents as lying under the power of the evil one. It has come to exist in this state through the works of the devil committed by those who act as his agents, beginning with Cain. First John 2:2 presents the atoning sacrifice as not only the solution to the problem of the sins of those within the community but also as the means of deliverance for the whole world, the entire created order, from the contamination which places it under the devil's power. Understood within a Jewish milieu, the argument of 1 John 2:2 can be seen to be drawing upon pre-existing conceptions within Second Temple Judaism of both the world's corruption and the nature of the atonement.

[457] Olsson, *Letters*, 330.

[458] Brown, *Epistles*, 406–407.

VI. FIRST JOHN 2:2 AND THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

The Johannine community was, by nature, a Jewish community. Its Jewish identity is not primarily a statement of the ethnicity of the constituent members of the community, but one of culture and self-identity. For the Johannine community, the Jewish Scriptures are the Scriptures. Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, and the retraction of that confession has led the secessionists to depart from that community. The Johannine community had received those of Gentile background not by requiring them to become Jewish through the identity markers of the old covenant, but through integration into the community. This change in individual identity took place through identification with the community as a whole.[459]

First John was written to a community which was Jewish in character. The Epistle was written to that community to address an intra-Jewish conflict over the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. Atonement within the text of the Epistle can therefore not be understood apart from atonement as practiced within Jewish ritual context.[460] Within this ritual context, the Day of Atonement serves as the primary aspect of ritual life in which atonement takes place.[461] Not only the concept of atonement itself but the particular argument of 1 John 2:2, that Christ's atoning

[459] Brown sees a broad agreement among reconstructions of the history of the Johannine community that there existed an initial community layer composed of Jewish members with Gentile members later coming in numbers and eventually predominating. Brown's view of the relative Christologies of these groups is not germain when reading the Epistle against the background of an inter-Jewish conflict. Brown, *Community*, 25.

[460] Ollson, *Letters*, 302.

[461] Brown, *Epistles*, 220.

sacrifice is for not only our sins but also "for the whole world" must be understood within this ritual frame.

The thematic structure of 1 John describes the corruption of the world in terms of "the whole world" lying under the power of the evil one (5:19). The world has been subjugated to the evil one through the works of the devil (3:8). These works are performed not only by the devil himself but by and through those who are his children, those who are of the world, beginning with Cain (3:12–15). This characterization reflects the theme in Second Temple Jewish literature[462] that the corruption of the world is not primarily the result of the fall of Adam, but rather the result of human corruption, beginning with Cain, under the influence of malign spiritual powers.[463] It is not coincidental that many of these texts identify the figure behind the world's corruption as Azazel, the evil figure of the wilderness in the Day of Atonement ritual.

The Day of Atonement ritual was composed of two ritual moments related to the two goats used in that ritual. The first goat was used to remove the sins of the people from the community. The second goat was offered as a sacrifice, and its blood used to purify the sanctuary. This second element of purification enacts the cleansing and decontamination of the sanctuary and through the sanctuary the camp and later nation, from the corruption of sin. These two elements of the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, the removal of sin and the purification of its stain from sacred space seen as physical space and its contents, are paralleled in 1 John 2:2.

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[462] No claim is here made or implied that 1 John is literarily dependent upon any of the texts here referenced or cited. Rather, these texts represent the conceptual milieu present in Jewish communities of the first century CE. These are ideas and ways of conceptualizing, in this case, the origin of evil, corruption, and ritual impurity and the means of dealing with it. As a community with a Jewish identity, these ideas would have likewise been current in the Johannine community, such that John can marshal these arguments in his dispute with the secessionists over the identity of the Messiah and the nature of Christ's atoning work.

[463] Fourth Ezra is a notable exception to this general trend, which is exemplified by 1 Enoch and Jubilees amongst other tests. Brown, *Epistles*, 222–223.

Christ's atoning sacrifice is offered for the sins of God's people in a final sense and also "for the whole world." First John 2:2 argues that in addition to cleansing from sin itself, sacred space has been extended by Christ's sacrifice to encompass the whole world. The corruption brought about through the evil one and those "of" him and of the world is also cleansed and purified. To deny that Jesus is the Messiah who has come and has accomplished this in his flesh and blood is to return one's self to the world.

A. The Corruption of the World

From the beginning, the book of Genesis depicts sin as having a corrupting influence not only on humanity but upon the physical created order. In Genesis 3, in the pronouncement of the curse, neither Adam nor Eve is the recipient of a curse. Rather, the serpent is cursed (3:14), and the ground is cursed because of Adam (3:17).[464] This curse upon the ground results in a variety of hardships for humanity going forward from this point. All of these hardships center around the physical order's lack of cooperation with humanity in sustaining its life and well-being. This pollution of the earth is the direct result of disobedient human action.

This effect of human sinfulness upon the created order becomes an ongoing theme in the Torah. Abel's innocent blood taints the earth and cries out from it, as does the blood of other murdered innocents (Gen 4:10; Deut 21:1–9). At Noah's birth, his father Lamech describes the purpose of the flood prophetically as freeing the earth and, through this, humanity from the curse brought upon it by human sin (Gen 5:29). Deut 28:20–24 elaborates the curses of the Torah in full, categorizing them in two ways. The created order is tainted and rendered hostile by human

[464] Byron, *Cain and Abel,* 93–94.

sin, and sinful humanity must be purged from the land so that the land's pollution may be corrected.

First John 3:11–18 traces human sin and corruption not to Adam and his disobedience in the garden, but Cain and his act of murder.[465] Identifying Cain as the prime figure in the history of human sin is not a quirk of 1 John if the Epistle, but rather a typical emphasis for a work of Second Temple Jewish literature. Based on Jewish literature and works of scriptural interpretation still extant, positing Cain as the beginning of sin's corruption was a majority view by the first century CE.[466] This view was also commonplace in the earliest phase of Christian interpretation of these texts. While this corruption begins with Cain's act, this corruption continues and escalates through the early chapters of Genesis. Jewish literature of the Second Temple period links the story of this escalating corruption with the action of malign spiritual powers. Through these spiritual powers, the literature further links this corruption of the material created order to the Day of Atonement as a solution to its problem.

1. Cain and His Descendants

Though Genesis presents the sin of Adam as the first trespass of divine command and this trespass brings about death and a curse, the word "sin" is not used to describe this disobedience. The term "sin" first occurs in the narrative of Genesis in relation to the person of Cain (4:7).[467] This text describes sin as a crouching animal or a malicious power that seeks mastery over Cain,

[465] Byron, "Sacrilege," 526.

[466] Brown, *Epistles*, 222–223.

[467] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 219.

rather than as a transgression of a commandment per se.[468] Cain is also the first agent of human death in the murder of his brother. Though his parents were mortal, neither had died at the time of Abel's murder, making the latter the first human to fall victim to death.[469] These distinctions led to to a vast swathe of early Jewish and Christian interpreters understanding Cain as the primary human agent of sin and death in the world.

The Book of Wisdom's tenth chapter gives an extensive listing of the enemies of wisdom who, therefore, become enemies of the righteous. Cain is the first listed and the only person which this list describes as "unrighteous" (10:3). Beyond merely the first sinner or murderer and the offender in the first murder, an act of fratricide, Cain is the archetype of all sin and wickedness for all generations to come.[470] Wisdom goes on, however, to ascribe to Cain responsibility for the flood many generations later (10:4). Cain not only bears guilt and responsibilities for his crimes, but his crimes pollute the world for generations in a way which ultimately brings destruction upon the whole created order.[471]

Josephus likewise posits Cain as the originator and archetypal figure related to human sin.[472] He describes Cain as not only unrighteous but as "most evil."[473] Josephus portrays Cain as not only an unrepentant doer of evil but also as a teacher of evil who actively promoted evil to

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[468] While this verbal root can simply refer to sin as "crouching" or lying in wait, the specific word used may be related to an Akkadian term for "demon." This word choice implies what is later borne out in the text, that Cain's sinful deeds are works performed under the influence of a malign spiritual power. E.A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 32–33.

[469] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 219.

[470] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 207.

[471] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 207–208.

[472] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.53.

[473] Πονηρότατος. Cf. 1 John 3:12's description of Cain as πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αυτοῦ.

his descendants.[474] Therefore, each generation of Cain's descendants became even more wicked than the generation before.[475] Cain sets in motion a cycle of corruption and pollution of the world which ultimately leads to the flood as a divine means of purifying the corrupted created order.[476] He does this not passively by being the first in a series of sinners, but by actively sinning and teaching wickedness. Josephus thus sees Cain as the founder and originator of sin and its corrupting effects on the world.[477]

Early interpreters understood the genealogy of Cain (Gen 4:17–22) in terms of this continued snowballing of sin and wickedness through each subsequent generation of Cain's descendants.[478] Within the genealogy of Cain, the figure of Lamech is of greatest consequence as the only figure concerning whom the genealogy gives further detail. In addition to serving as the literary culmination of the genealogy as recorded in Gen, Lamech is the seventh generation for Adam.[479] The seventh position also parallels Lamech in Cain's genealogy with Enoch in that of Seth (Gen 5:21–24).[480] Lamech is further the first mentioned practitioner of polygamy (Gen 4:19). Polygamy associates Lamech with not only the bloodshed in abundance beyond that of his

[474] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.61.

[475] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.66.

[476] This line of interpretation ultimately produced a trope which saw Cain as the first heretic. This trope is found in interpreters as diverse as Philo, Targums *Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan*, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. Jude 11 connects heretics with Cain. This line of thought likely lies behind 1 John 3's association of the unrighteous Cain with the secessionists from the Johannine community. Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 225–232.

[477] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 208.

[478] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 140.

[479] Augustine found this to be of particular import in presenting Lamech as the fullness of Cain's line and therefore also of his trajectory of sin and corruption. *City of God*, 15.17.

[480] Cf. Jude 14.

ancestor, Cain, after whom he names one of his sons but also with sexual sin in the mind of early interpreters.[481]

Josephus describes Cain's crimes, in a list extending far beyond the description of Gen 4, as being motivated by the fulfillment of bodily desires.[482] He, therefore, sees Lamech's described sins as merely those of his ancestor, albeit multiplied exponentially. The sons of Lamech, then, with their described occupations represent various divisions of the sin and wickedness which Cain brought into the world.[483] Both Philo and Josephus see Tubal-Cain's involvement in metallurgy as oriented particularly toward war and mass murder, making it a form of the perfection of Cain's original sin of murder.[484] It is the consistent interpretation of the Targums at Gen 4:26 that the sons of Lamech were also associated with the origin of idolatry and thereby sexual immorality.[485] In certain traditions which understood Gen 6:1–4 to be referring to the fornication of angels and humans, even this sin was attributed to the female descendants of Cain seducing the angelic beings.[486]

Just as Cain's evil is magnified in future generations of his descendants, so also is his curse. Early interpreters see the curse of Cain particularly in terms of his relationship to the created order. Because of Adam's disobedience, the ground was cursed creating difficulties for him in working the land (Gen 3:17). Cain, rather, is himself cursed "from the ground" (4:11).

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[481] Eg. Jerome, *Letter 79*, 10.

[482] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.61.

[483] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 144.

[484] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.64; Philo, *Posterity*, 116–117.

[485] Cf. Targums *Pseudo-Jonathan*, *Neofiti*, *Onqelos*, and other fragmentary sources.

[486] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 153–155. The opposite understanding, that malign spiritual powers were responsible for the corruption of Cain himself and his line was far more common.

Early interpreters understood the shift in the phrasing of the curse to represent Cain's sin as more serious than that of Adam.[487] Early interpreters such as Pseudo-Philo saw an element within this curse which fell upon the earth itself, furthering the corruption which began as a result of Adam's disobedience.[488]

The magnification of the curse because of the magnification of Cain's wickedness turned the alienation of Adam from the earth which produced hardship in agricultural endeavors to a state of outright hostility by the created order.[489] The curse made Cain's continued farming activity impossible (Gen 4:2), leading to his building of a city and his descendants' devotion to the activities of civilized life (4:17–22). Philo understands the enmity of the cursed earth against Cain to include all of the elements, bodies of fresh water, and even the sun, moon, and stars of heaven.[490] Further, this corruption of sin causes the hostility of wild animals according to Philo and Josephus.[491]

Drawing upon these interpretive traditions, 1 John utilizes the example of Cain to describe sin, the enmity of the unrighteous against the righteous, and the corruption of the world by the evil one through human agency. That Cain is here referenced without a retelling of the story or a direct citation of Genesis again implies a Jewish audience sufficiently familiar with Cain and associated traditions to understand the example.[492] While 1 John 3:11–18 deals with the

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[487] The language of the curse placed on Cain parallels that of the serpent rather than that of his father. Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 94.

[488] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 95.

[489] Byron, *Cain and Abel*, 97.

[490] Philo, *Questions and Solutions in Genesis*, 1.71.

[491] Philo, *Questions and Solutions in Genesis*, 1.74; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.59.

[492] Olsson, *Letters*, 329–331.

example of Cain in particular, Lieu argues that it lies in the background of the entire chapter.[493] The frame of chapter 3 sets the story of Cain within the context of themes of purity and, relatedly, sacrifice. The curse brought about by sin and wickedness creates impurity, which impurity is cleansed using sacrifice.

First John 3:3 describes the Johannine community members as "pure." Brooke and Smalley understand purity here in a moral sense.[494] Brown incorporates a sense of ritual purity in addition to the moral, connecting the reference of 3:3 to Christian baptism.[495] Taken alongside 1 John's imagery of sacrifice including in the use of Cain's example, the presence of at least an element of ritual purity in addition to the moral sense is likely.[496] The term here translated as "pure," ἁγνός, is used consistently to describe ritual purity (e.g., Ex 19:10–11; Num 8:21; 4 Macc 5:37; John 11:55; Acts 21, 24, 26). Given the understanding of the relationship between Cain's sin and the corruption of the world produced thereby, the distinction between ritual and moral impurity may here be moot.

Though 1 John 3 does not use the term, the antithetical concept to "purity" is ἅγος, "accursed."[497] This accursed state is one of ritual impurity contracted through certain crimes of sacrilege including the murder of an innocent victim or a family member. [498] Such a state could not be propitiated.[499] The "pure" and "accursed" states in a ritual sense are contrasted frequently

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[493] Lieu, "What Was from the Beginning," 470.

[494] Brooke, *Epistles*, 84; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 149.

[495] Brown, *Epistles*, 397–398.

[496] Byron, "Sacrilege," 529.

[497] Byron, "Sacrilege," 531.

[498] LSJ, s.v. "ἅγος."

[499] Outside of the context of scriptural commentary, ἅγος is used consistently for acts of murder, particularly such acts which take place in sacred space. Joseph uses the term in a speech in which Ananus the high priest decries the murder of certain men by zealots within the Jerusalem temple complex. *Jewish War*, 4.163. Both

in Philo. Philo uses the term "accursed" 19 times, seventeen of which are directly related to ideas of sacred space and ritual purity.[500] The particular crimes involved are various forms of murder which render the perpetrators unable to perform sacred rites. For Philo, this focuses centrally on acts of fratricide in Levites killing other Israelites under particular conditions in the Hebrew Scriptures. That these Levites continue to carry on their ritual duties in sacred space presents for Philo something of an insoluble problem.[501]

For Philo, Cain is the accursed one *par excellence*. He uses the term "accursed" to describe Cain five times.[502] In four out of the five cases, Philo also uses the term ἀδελφοκτόνος, "brother-slayer" or "fratricide" to describe Cain's crime which brought about this state. First John 3 contrasts the purity of Christ and those who follow him with Cain who murdered his brother and the pollution caused thereby. The use of Cain in this context shifts the focus from the forgiveness of sins to ritual purification of the curse.

The verb used to describe Cain's act of murder in 1 John 3:12 is also unusual for this purpose.[503] The verb σφάζω, "slaughter," is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Revelation (5:6; 6:4; 13:3; 18:24). In the LXX, it is used commonly to describe the killing of sacrificial victims (e.g., Gen 22:10; Lev 1:5; Isa 57:5; Ezek 16:21; 23:39). Philo uses "slaughter"

Herodotus and Thucydides use the term to describe perpetrators of violence within temples. In Herodotus the victims were members of a peasant revolt slain in the temple of Demeter in Aegina. *Histories*, 6.91. Thucydides describes a similar set of events when the killing of revolutionaries in the temple at the Acropolis in Athens rendered the perpetrators "accursed." This, in turn, caused them and their descendants, who also held this status, to be expelled from Athens permanently. *History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.80–85.

[500] Byron, "Sacrilege," 530.

[501] Byron, "Sacrilege," 531.

[502] Philo, *Worse*, 96; *Posterity*, 49; *Husbandry*, 21; *Virtues*, 199; *Questions and Answers in Genesis*, 1.77.

[503] Byron, "Sacrilege," 531–532.

to describe the killing of sacrificial victims.[504] Josephus likewise uses "slaughter" in sacrificial contexts.[505] Josephus also uses the term, however, to describe killings which he is analogizing to sacrifice.[506] Murders which take place in sacred space or represent sacrificial death, in Josephus' understanding, are, therefore "slaughters."

In 1 John 3:12, the use of "slaughter" carries with it this same analogical force. Closely related to the antithetical contrast of Christ and Cain in purity and accursed impurity is the comparison of Christ's atoning sacrifice to the slaughter of righteous Abel. Through the actions of sinful humanity, beginning with Cain, the world itself has become accursed and corrupt. It is the perspective of 1 John and of other early Jewish and Christian tradition that this human wickedness was not entirely self-motivated, but rather were performed under the influence and at the bidding of malign spiritual forces.

2. Azazel

First John presents the whole world as lying under the power of the evil one (5:19). It lies subject to his power through the corruption of his works (3:8). These works are performed not by the evil one directly but through human agents of sin, beginning with Cain (3:11–14). The impure state of curse which results from these sinful works corrupts not only the person but the created world itself. Within Second Temple Jewish literature there is a demonic figure commonly associated with Cain and his descendants' corruption and the corruption of the material world in

[504] Philo, *Heir*, 20; *Special Laws*, 1.212; 3.91; *Eternity*, 20; *Providence*, 2.32.

[505] Eg. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 3.206, 226, 237, 242, 249.

[506] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14.66; 17.237–239; *Jewish War*, 1.35; 2.240.

terms resonant with those used in 1 John. That figure is the fallen angel Azazel.[507] It is not a coincidence that Azazel is also the figure referenced in the institution of the Day of Atonement ritual (Lev 16). The figure of Azazel within the ritual atonement practiced in Israel and later Judea was understood by the first century CE to be this same demonic figure.

While it is entirely possible within the original context of Lev 16:8, 10, 26 that the goat "for Azazel" may indicate that the goat is going to be used as a scapegoat,[508] in early Jewish interpretation as represented within Second Temple Jewish literature, Azazel is a demonic figure.[509] He is sometimes, but not always, associated with the serpent of Gen 3. The source of the initial identification of Azazel as such a demonic entity may be a connection between Azazel's association with the wilderness in the Day of Atonement ritual and the "goat demon" in the wilderness whose worship is condemned in Lev 17:7.[510]

The primary extant source for the portrayal of Azazel as a demonic entity of the wilderness associated with the Day of Atonement ritual is the Enochic literature and other literature under its influence. The relevant portion of 1 Enoch is the "Book of the Watchers" which comprises the first 36 chapters of the text.[511] The "Book of the Watchers" consists of a retelling of the early chapters of Gen from an apocalyptic perspective which purports to reveal

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[507] Janowski, "Azazel," in *DDD*, 128–131.

[508] This understands the name "Azazel" as "Ez-azel" or "the goat which escapes." Texts which understand this as the name of a demonic entity offer an alternative etymology, "Zaza-el" or "strong one against God" as in 4Q180. This spelling is used in the Syriac rendering of Lev 16. Rabbinic interpretation predominantly understands "Azazel" as referring to a steep cliff or rocky crag, related to the eventual tradition of pushing the goat "for Azazel" from such a ridge in order to bring about its demise. J. Frederic McCurdy, "Azazel." In *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, edited by Isidore Singer. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1905), 365–366.

[509] The name of this entity is generally spelled in accordance with Lev 16 as "Azazel." In other texts, particular texts involving transliteration to a non-Semitic language, it is spelled "Azael" or "Asael." Key texts include 1 Enoch 8:1; 9:6; 10:4–8; 13:1 and Apocalypse of Abraham 13:6–14; 14:4–6.

[510] Janowski, "Azazel," in *DDD*, 129.

[511] Robert Helm, "Azazel in Early Jewish Tradition," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32 (1994): 218.

spiritual realities underlying the scriptural text. In the case of the genealogy of Cain and his descendants, 1 Enoch describes that the various technological and cultural innovations made by Cain and his line came into existence through the revelation of secret wisdom by rebellious angels.[512] Azazel is the chief angelic being involved in the revelation of this wisdom as described in 1 Enoch 8:1–3. A direct connection is made here between the metallurgical innovations attributed to Tubal-Cain in Gen 4:22 and the work of Azazel. The result is that "the world was changed" because of the impiety and sexual immorality of human beings at Azazel's instigation, rendering everything subject to corruption.[513]

Later in 1 Enoch, the results of Azazel's wickedness and patronage of wicked men is summarized more broadly. First Enoch 9:6 states, "See then what Azazel has done. That he has taught all sin on the earth and revealed the eternal mysteries which were made in heaven." In 1 Enoch 10, divine judgment is pronounced against Azazel to be carried out by the angel Raphael. First Enoch describes this judgment as his being bound hand and foot and thrown into a hole in the desert from a rocky crag and buried in sharp rocks, likely related to the tradition of throwing the goat for Azazel from such a crag.[514] From this bound imprisonment he will be hurled into the fire on the last day (10:4–6, cf. 54:5).

After describing this scene of punishment, 1 Enoch 10:8 describes the charges against Azazel, "And the whole earth has been corrupted by the teaching of the works of Azazel. To him ascribe all sin." This statement has both a historical and ritual significance. It ascribes to Azazel as a hostile spiritual power the responsibility for human sin and the corruption of the earth

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[512] William H. Shea, "Azazel in the Pseudepigrapha," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13 (2002): 2.

[513] Shea, "Azazel," 2–3.

[514] Helm, "Azazel," 219–221.

through his works. The ascription of all sin to Azazel also mirrors the pronouncement by Aaron over the goat for Azazel of all the sins of the people (Lev 16:21).[515] This language regarding Azazel parallels closely the language used by 1 John regarding the devil. In particular, it mirrors 1 John 5:19's statement that "the whole world lies under the power of the evil one" and 3:8's statement that the Son of God appeared to destroy "the works of the devil."

The other significant text describing Azazel as a demonic entity is the Apocalypse of Abraham. He is described in this text in terms remarkably similar to those of the Enochic literature, arguing for an influence of the latter on the former.[516] Specifically, in both texts, Azazel is the leader of the band of rebel angels who conspired against God. Both connect the angels to the stars of the heavens. In both, Azazel is responsible for revealing the secrets of heaven and is, therefore, cast out into the wilderness where he is imprisoned.

The Apocalypse of Abraham uses the Enochic portrayal of Azazel to dramatize a final, eschatological Day of Atonement.[517] Abraham's angelic companion who accompanies him through his series of apocalyptic visions is Yahoel. This heavenly figure is described in high priestly terms, beginning with his described attire.[518] The end of Abraham's journey is, in fact, the heavenly sanctuary which the Apocalypse depicts as being the true temple of God over against the earthly copy.[519] Just as the entrance of the high priest into the earthly sanctuary

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[515] Shea, "Azazel," 3–4.

[516] Andrei A. Orlov, *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 37.

[517] Orlov, *Dark Mirrors*, 37–38.

[518] This is chiefly centered around Yahoel's linen headband, parallel to the linen headpiece worn by Aaron. This turban on the angel appears 'rainbow-like', which is a common description in later literature of the stones of the high priest's turban. There also appears to be a parallel between the golden rod carried by Yahoel and Aaron's rod. Orlov, *Dark Mirrors*, 27–28.

[519] Orlov, *Dark Mirrors*, 28.

accompanies the sending away of the sins of the people to Azazel in his goat, so also is the entrance into the heavenly sanctuary to purify the creation is accompanied by the sending out and final condemnation of Azazel. The action of the Apocalypse of Abraham surrounding Azazel revolves around his condemnation to the fiery pit. Along with him, the angels and humans whom he has led into sin are likewise condemned. This condemnation of Azazel and his "children" is part and parcel of the final cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.[520] In a parallel with the works of Azazel, Yahoel teaches the rite of condemnation to Abraham who performs the condemnation as a "priest in training."[521]

Azazel is also mentioned as a demonic being in similar terms in 4Q180 and 4Q203, the "Book of the Giants." Both of these Qumran texts describe the punishment of Azazel. In both, he receives the responsibility, and the punishment, for all of the sins of the other fallen angelic beings as well as those instigated by them and committed by human agents. Tawil traces this tradition of demonic entities dwelling in the wilderness to certain Akkadian texts describing demons who escape the underworld through crags and crevices in the ground to make their abode in desert places.[522]

Second Temple Jewish traditions regarding Azazel serve to connect several themes within 1 John. Azazel, as described in these texts, fits the profile of the devil or the evil one as described in 1 John. This devil figure is responsible for the corruption not only of humanity through sin, but of the world itself through the corruption and curse brought about by that sin. Having been corrupted by his works, performed by his spiritual children beginning with Cain,

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[520] Orlov, *Dark Mirrors*, 45–46.

[521] Orlov, *Dark Mirrors*, 46.

[522] Hayim Tawil, "Azazel, the Prince of the Steepe: A Comparative Study," *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92 (1980): 48–49.

the whole world now lies under his power. The Son of God has appeared to destroy those works. First John envisions the means of that destruction as atonement. The Day of Atonement ritual connects atonement to the figure of Azazel.

Within these Second Temple Jewish traditions, a final eschatological Day of Atonement is envisioned, performed by a heavenly high priest. In 1 John 2:1–2, Christ is described as the one who performs this high priestly function. This atonement is made not only for the sins of the Johannine community as it once had been for Israel, but now also "for the whole world" in purifying the world of the corruption and curse resulting from sin. The purification of the physical world represents the second major moment within the Day of Atonement ritual.

B. Atonement for the Physical World

Leviticus 16 describes the initial, prescribed shape[523] of the Day of Atonement[524] ritual for the Israelite people. Many studies of this ritual focus on the act of atonement[525] itself, centering

[523] That this is the initial, prescribed shape bears importance, as the ritual aspect of the Day of Atonement developed substantially over subsequent centuries and then at the destruction of the second temple took on another shape entirely. One set of later traditional practices is witnessed to by *Barnabas* (7–8). Various sects of Second Temple Judaism had intense disagreements about the minutiae of the ritual. See Isaac Kalimi, "The Day of Atonement in the Late Second Temple Period: Sadducees' High Priests, Pharisees' Norms, and Qumranites' Calendar(s)," *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 14 (2011): 71-91. These disagreements are largely due to the centrality of this rite not only in the text of the Pentateuch in Lev 16, but also because of the central importance of atonement for sin in religious life.

[524] The common translation of Yom Kippur as Day of Atonement has been questioned recently. The word "atonement" is itself a neologism of the 16th century, formed from the earlier phrase "at onement," which appeared as early as the works of Wycliffe in the 14th century. J. H. Hayes, "Atonement in the Book of Leviticus," *Interpretation* 52 (1998): 5. Other suggestions have included "Day of Purgation" or "Day of Purification." The NRSV frequently alternates the word "atonement" with the word "reconciliation." Jacob Milgrom's interpretation of atonement as "purification offering" has become widely accepted and influential. Roy Gane, *Cult and Character* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), xx.

[525] The verb *kpr* is used in the piel to describe the action of the priest in this context. It is used in Lev 14 in parallel to terms general translated "to cleanse" or "to purify" (v. 48. 52. 53). It appears to be related to an Akkadian

around the two animals involved and how the application of the ritual to humans atones for the sins of the people. This understanding is then used in canonical context to discuss later doctrines, either Jewish or Christian, and supporting theories, of atonement. In verses 18 and 19, however, there is an additional, more often neglected element, that of the atonement for the sanctuary itself.[526] The atonement for the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement stands in parallel to the atonement offered at the initial sanctification of the physical accouterment of the sanctuary. Just as the people, having consecrated themselves initially at the ratification of the covenant, are again consecrated through the Day of Atonement ritual to account for the effects of subsequent sin, so also the physical space and objects which dwell in the presence of God must be again consecrated.

1. Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement itself as prescribed in Leviticus 16 is a complex annual rite, to take place on the tenth day of the seventh month of each year. In addition to being described as a Sabbath (v. 31), it contains at least three identifiable elements: sin offerings, the consecration of worship space and objects utilized therein, and the scapegoat ritual. All three of these acts bring about atonement individually and collectively as the ritual of that day. While the element relevant to

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cognate meaning "to wipe." There is therefore a possible conceptual connection here between the wiping of blood on the altar's horns, and the wiping away of sin. Hayes, "Atonement," 9.

[526] While later Jewish and Christian understandings of atonement should not be read back into the initial delineation of the observance and its ritual, it is even more perilous to attempt to find parallels between the sacrificial rituals of the Hebrew Bible and those of other cultures, be they ancient Near Eastern or later Indo-European. This has been attempted to a great degree with Greek and Roman sacrificial ritual. Simply put, scholarship does not currently have access to sufficient comparable information to make these parallels valid sources of understanding for the Levitical rituals themselves. Ithamar Gruenwald, "Sacrifices in Biblical Literature and Ritual Theory," *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 4 (2001): 2.

the atonement described in 1 John 2:2d is the middle term of these three, the ritual as a whole, and the other two main elements of that ritual, also bear discussion to place the area of primary concern in the proper context.

After undertaking the typical ceremonial washings and vesting required generally for service in the tabernacle, the high priest, beginning with Aaron, would prepare a series of animals for the sacrificial offerings. While many discussions of animal sacrifice focus on the act of ceremonial killing, the killing of the animals is not the focus of ceremony or ritual, but rather how the meat and blood are offered and utilized.[527] In addition to a young bull offered as a sin offering for the high priest and his household in a typical manner,[528] he selects two young goats, one of which, decided by lot, is offered as a sin offering for the people.[529] The blood from both of these offerings is then sprinkled throughout the sanctuary and upon the mercy seat, the altar, and the rest of the tabernacle worship space. Finally, the remaining young goat has hands placed upon it and the sins of the people spoken over it before being sent out of the camp to die in the

[527] There exists in many studies of Hebrew sacrificial ritual a focus on either the volitional aspect of sacrifice, the offering as a gift from a person to God, or on a notion of substitution, an implied or expressed identity between the offeror and the sacrificial victim. Both of these foci, however, treat the sacrificial ritual in terms of what is being expressed from the worldview of the sacrificial worshipper rather than on the sacrificial act itself in terms of ritual or what is seen to be happening in the liturgical actions of the sacrifice themselves. Lev 16, with its focus precisely on the particular acts to be ritually conducted, lends itself to the latter treatment. Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 3.

[528] The animal offerings here are, for example, roughly parallel to those enjoined for unintentional sins in Lev 4. A bull is offered for the sins of the high priest and a goat for the people. The blood is likewise sprinkled seven times, though in a somewhat different procedure.

[529] There is a great deal of discussion as to whether or not the various ritual offerings described in Leviticus represent a consistent ritual system. This is not only a question of the broad unity of Leviticus and the unity of Lev 16 in particular with the remainder of the book. Some have even divided P portions of chapter 16 from the rest of that chapter, seeing within the description of the event, which is in places topical rather than temporal, an innate disunity. While it is impossible to demonstrate in a conclusive manner exactly which portions of the text of Leviticus, on either the larger or smaller scale, stem from what pieces of pre-existing tradition, if such discreet traditions even exist, more conclusive statements can be made regarding the final form of the text. Whether there are separate atonement traditions which have here merged or not, the ritual at some point in the history of ancient Hebrew religion took on the form now found in Lev 16. In this final form, Lev 16 functions well with the other sacrificial rituals described in that book. Gane, *Cult*, 25–37. Certainly, the form known in the first century CE, to the author and recipients of 1 John, conformed to the description of Lev 16, albeit with some further elaboration and added symbolism grounded in religious reflection.

wilderness. Ritually enacted here are the usual peace offering ritual as well as the removal of and cleansing from sin[530] that bring about the state of rest and peace that allow for the description of the Day of Atonement as a Sabbath of Sabbaths.

In between these two liturgical moments lies the sprinkling of blood in the sanctuary and specifically upon the mercy seat and on the horns of the altar. This annual ritual action stands parallel to the actions surrounding the initial dedication of these liturgical items and the liturgical space. Just as Aaron and the other priests were anointed with oil and consecrated for service, the liturgical articles and the tabernacle itself were anointed with oil to consecrate them for service. Now, the sin offering renews the holy status of Aaron and his household to enable them to safely stand in the presence of the Lord (16:2). So also the holy status of the objects used in the tabernacle must be restored using the sacrificial blood to allow for their continued use within the tabernacle itself for the sacrificial rituals.[531] This parallel in the ritual and in the text which initially describes it implies that not only are the priests themselves, and the Israelites themselves affected by their sin and uncleanness but even the inanimate objects within the camp, and the central sanctuary, experience the consequence of that sin, and the resultant need for purification.

Beyond these three liturgical moments, by reordering the instructions of this chapter to outline the proceeding of the ritual on the Day of Atonement as described by Leviticus, there can be seen to be five sub-rituals which are presided over by the high priest.[532] The first ritual is the

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[530] Both the patent significance of the goat carrying the sins of the people away into the wilderness and the linguistic significance of the term generally translated as "sin offering," which in the piel form (for example in Lev 8:14–15) means "to purge" or "to purify' rather than simply referring to sin or transgression, speak to the cleansing and removal of sin from the people. Hayes, "Atonement," 8.

[531] This reflects two of the major categories of ritual practice. The initial consecration of the priests and the sanctuary and its contents represent rituals of origination while the ceremonial actions of the Day of Atonement itself "represent rituals of restoration and reintegration which participate in and mirror the return to established order and normalcy." Hayes, "Atonement," 6.

[532] Gane, *Cult*, 218.

pair of purification offerings offered by the high priest, the bull for himself and his own family and the goat for the people. After offering the goat, the high priest sprinkles its blood in the sanctuary. The third is the confession of sin over the scapegoat followed by the goat being lead out of the camp and into the wilderness. Fourth comes the offering of two rams, one on behalf of himself and his family and the other for the people. Though Lev 16 does not state it, Num 29:8–11 adds grain and drink offerings to each of these.[533] Finally, he burns the fatty portions of the animals, and the remains are buried outside of the camp. The scapegoat ritual and the offering of the two rams occur amid the atonement offerings which are begun before and completed after them. The burnt offerings represent a gift offered to God within the process of removing impediments to reconciliation, in much the same way that Jacob's various gifts to Esau functioned within the reconciliation of the two brothers.[534]

2. Sin and the Sanctuary

This relationship between sin and the inanimate created order is developed elsewhere in the Torah, beginning in Gen 3:17 when the ground itself is cursed because of Adam's sin. While some would interpret this curse as merely a broken relationship between Adam and the rest of the creation, this theme of the land itself becoming tainted is continued within the holiness code of Leviticus as particular sins are said to defile the land itself, like sexual immorality (18:24). For God to return to dwell in the land, the land must be purified, and this purification will sweep

[533] Gane, *Cult*, 219.

[534] Jacob expresses his intent with these gifts as attempting to cover (lit. "atone") Esau's face with the offerings (Gen 32:20). In context, this clearly means to appease or propitiate him. This usage stands parallel to the way in which the incense offering covers the appearance of Yahweh above the mercy seat, protecting the high priest (Lev 16:13).

sinful humanity aside and destroy them if they do not first purify themselves, and the sanctuary.[535] The defilement of the sanctuary did not require the defiling acts to take place in the sanctuary, as the sanctuary proper represented the dwelling of God with his people. The defilement of the sanctuary, therefore, was a byproduct of the defilement of the people.[536]

For the sins and uncleanness of the people to contaminate the sanctuary, the uncleanness did not have to be contracted, or even brought into, the sanctuary, just as the sin did not have to take place there. As an example, Lev 20:3 states that anyone from the people of Israel who offers a child to Molech is to be cut off because they have defiled the sanctuary. It is not reasonable to surmise that this penalty was only due to those who constructed a shrine to Molech within the courts of the tabernacle or the later temple. Rather, such an act, committed anywhere by one of God's people defiles the sanctuary and the name of God himself.[537]

Idolatry, particularly idolatry which involves an act of human sacrifice and infanticide, is a serious sin but this defilement of the sanctuary from a distance can also result from ritual impurity rather than sin as such. Num 19:13 states that anyone who has touched a corpse, for any reason, is not only defiled themselves but, if they do not perform the proper cleansing ritual, defiles the tabernacle. Because they have not performed ritual washings, their defilement remains upon them. Because they remain defiled, that defilement extends to the tabernacle though there is

[535] This conceptual connection between the pollution of the land by sin and the idea of the sanctuary as such being polluted is made through the use of similar language in specific instances of uncleanness in the camp and of sins such as idolatry. In Leviticus 15:31, those with abnormal genital discharges must be kept from polluting the tabernacle. The tabernacle can also become polluted through the Israelites giving offerings to Molech, in Numbers 20:3, or by anyone who becomes unclean and does not cleanse themselves in Numbers 19:20, as for example if one becomes contaminated through contact with a corpse, per 19:13. Hayes, "Atonement," 6.

[536] Hayes, "Atonement," 6.

[537] Gane, *Cult*, 144.

no indication that the individual drew near to or entered the tabernacle or its courts.[538] While the distinction here between ritual impurity and sin as such is real, the refusal to follow prescribed cleansing ritual is itself an act of disobedience, thereby adding sin to uncleanness.

This dynamic of uncleansed impurity extending to the sanctuary in its defilement represents a major source of the contamination which requires cleansing through the Day of Atonement ritual from the sanctuary. What holds of ignored cleansable impurity can also be extended to hold for the expiable sin of which the bearer remains unrepentant and unwilling to make the relevant purification offerings.[539] God's presence among his people demands holiness from people and sanctuary. While the ritual prescribed in the Torah allowed for the restoration of that holiness after impurity or defilement, this restoration required the cooperation of the impure or sinning party. The lack of this cooperation endangered the whole people, and so in addition to other significance here discussed, the Day of Atonement allowed for the high priest to cleanse this impurity on behalf of the community even without the cooperation of that community's every member. The cleansing of this impurity from sanctuary and camp left the unpurified or unconfessed to suffer the consequences of their rebellion alone.[540]

It was, therefore, possible for someone within the Israelite community to pollute the sanctuary without actually entering, or even drawing physically near to it. Making all of the works of the community potential sources of contamination then adds significance to the

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[538] Gane, *Cult*, 144.

[539] Gane, *Cult*, 146.

[540] This distinction answers crucial questions regarding 1 John 2:2. Christ's atonement purifies the whole world as space and its contents from the curse and corruption of the sins of all people and thereby the control of the spiritual powers which collude in this sin. This purification does not represent forgiveness or purification parallel to that received by the "us" of the Johannine community to all people. Rather, it leaves the unrepentant to suffer the consequences of their sin alone.

warning of Lev 15:31 that the pollution of the tabernacle through impurity contracted by the people of Israel would result in their death. The warning does not refer to those who come to the tabernacle to make an offering in a state of uncleanness or wanton sin only, but even to those who defile the sanctuary from a distance.[541] The threat here, however, is that the people involved in the defilement of the tabernacle will die, rather than be exiled or experience the removal of God's presence from their midst. The proper performance of the Day of Atonement ritual by the high priest, both as intercessor and offeror of the atoning sacrifice, prevents this latter eventuality.

The fact that sin and defilement are here in view in an ontological sense rather than as abstract concepts does not mean that they exist as physical entities occupying a series of points in time and space. This language is ritual language, such that the things which it describes as entities, including not only sin or defilement but God or other supernatural entities, are real but not physical objects.[542] It is, therefore, a misunderstanding to attempt to discover how sin or corruption "travels" to the sanctuary from the place where an act is committed or from the person who commits the act. Every Israelite is connected to God by being part of his people, and so is in his presence even when not in the physical location which God has chosen in which to meet with his people. God's presence is not restricted to his sanctuary, and therefore the defilement of that sanctuary is possible at any point where he is present.

The ambivalence of the Torah regarding the special holiness of the tabernacle and later temple and priesthood, on the one hand, and the calling of the entire nation to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests on the other (Ex 19:6) reflects this understanding. On the one hand, the

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[541] Gane, *Cult*, 147.

[542] Gane, *Cult*, 148.

priesthood was set apart as individuals and families from the rest of Israel as holy, on the other hand, all of the people of Israel were called not only to consecrate themselves at the ratification of the covenant initially, but also to maintain holiness through the ritual means prescribed by the Torah. Likewise, the tabernacle and later the temple, as a sanctuary, were set apart as holy to be the place where the Lord dwelt, yet the whole camp and then the nation was called to be set apart from all the other nations of the world as holy to the Lord their God.[543] There is, therefore, no zone in which an Israelite is allowed to become and remain defiled or to commit sin without consequence. Exile from God's presence, as in the case of the scapegoat, brings about destruction, not freedom.

While not directly related to the sanctuary as such, there are some other examples of ritual impurity and sin affecting elements of the material world through means other than direct contact.[544] Num 19:14–15 judges that any open vessels which were in a space occupied by a dead body, whether or not they ever contact the body directly, are all unclean and defiled until purified. Directly pertinent to the Day of Atonement ritual, though their deaths were sacrificial offerings and their blood was used to purify the sanctuary, the remains of the sacrificed animals are still treated and disposed of as things defiled despite no physical means of contracting uncleanness. In Num 19, participation in the burning of the red heifer defiles the participants, even though its ashes are not considered unclean at the time of the burning. In Lev 14:34-36, the contents of a house where someone has contracted or entered with leprosy are considered unclean but are only considered unclean once a priest has pronounced the house to be contaminated with leprosy. Objects which are taken from the home before this official

[543] Gane, *Cult*, 158.

[544] Gane, *Cult*, 158–159.

determination are considered to remain clean. The contamination is therefore seen to be based not on contact or even proximity but upon ritual determination and concern.

All of these considerations presuppose a view of sin as a contaminant, at least at a ritual level, which seems contrary to the view of sin as the transgression of a commandment or other views of sin as primarily a legal category. Sin in this view is not only a deadly disease but a contagious one which, unless it or the perpetrator, is cut off from the people, will infect not only the sanctuary but the entire community.[545] These two modes of conceiving of sin, the legal and the biological, are not mutually exclusive. The violation of the laws and commandments of God, though requiring legal punishment, are remedied by rituals of purification and cleansing. The clearest example and the one most directly related to the Day of Atonement ritual proper is the case of the scapegoat itself. The high priest confesses the sins of the people, which is itself a legal term for a confession which seeks mercy in the face of justice, over the goat. The goat then bears the sins of the people away. The sins carried by the goat "infect" the one who leads the goat from the camp.[546]

Sin is therefore seen to be a complex reality, perceived from various angles within ritual consciousness. Atonement, therefore, does involve freedom from the condemnation resultant from violation of the law seen as the commandments of God. It cannot, however, be limited to merely escaping these legal consequences.[547] There are, also, broken relationships not only with God but also with fellow human persons. There are issues of justice and restitution in a civil context. There are physical and psychological consequences in addition to deleterious spiritual

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[545] Gane, *Cult*, 160.

[546] Gane, *Cult*, 161.

[547] Gane, *Cult*, 161.

effects. The Day of Atonement ritual can be seen to address sin and pollution of people and sanctuary at all of these levels to various extents through the lens of ritual.

These are inseparable aspects of sin as such, and it is therefore not possible, in terms of the Levitical ritual, to talk about individual sins and means of contracting uncleanness which are less severe or unrelated to the sanctuary and those which are most severe or pollute the sanctuary. There are not sins which are infractions and other sins which are pollutants. Any uncleanness, if left uncleansed, becomes a defilement of the sanctuary by the disobedience involved in not partaking of the prescribed cleansing through ritual.[548]

This relationship between the sins of the individual and the pollution of the sanctuary is seen clearly in the instructions regarding unintentional sin found in Lev 4.[549] After the offering of sacrificial animals and the sprinkling of blood to cleanse the sanctuary, the offender's sins are said to be passively forgiven. While one should not delineate the various aspects of sin and forgiveness from one another too strictly, it would seem that in these cases it is not the unintentional offense that has injured the relationship with God and therefore necessitates reconciliation but the defilement of the sanctuary that results from the sinful act regardless of intent.[550] Purification, therefore, brings about forgiveness.

These sin offerings do not specify where the sin itself lies, whether it lay on the person who has committed it or whether it is connected to the sanctuary itself and is therefore covered and cleansed when the blood of the sacrifice is placed upon the altar by the priest.[551] This

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[548] Gane, *Cult*, 162–163.

[549] Hayes, "Atonement," 9.

[550] Hayes, "Atonement," 10.

[551] Gane, *Cult*, 106.

question is natural to an understanding of atonement as purification or purgation. What or who is it that is purified or purged? In this regard, it is worth noting that the sprinkling of the blood comes after ritual washing and vesting by the priest and that the blood, the focus of the atonement ritual, is applied only inside the sanctuary. It is not, in the context of these rituals, applied to a person or persons.[552]

Though offerings were made regularly for unintentional and for intentional sins as described in Lev 5, the description of the Day of Atonement ritual describes a situation in which no matter how fastidiously the Israelites have attempted to repent of their sins and offer the requisite restitution and sacrifice, the pollution had continued to accumulate in the context of the sanctuary. The accumulation of corruption required an annual cleansing.[553] It is not merely a question of guilt over intentional wrongdoing in the violation of the commandments but is the consequence of the "uncleanness and the rebellions of the Israelites, including all of their sins" (v. 16). The middle term of this list, "rebellion," is a most serious rupture of the covenantal relationship between Israel and its God.[554] There is, therefore, an annual rededication of the people centered around the sanctuary to purge away the moral and physical pollution from their midst and begin again.

There is much debate concerning the precise relationship between the regular sin, guilt, and peace offerings made periodically for those who have sinned, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, and the Day of Atonement. Some see that defilement which is purified by the Day

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[552] Gane, *Cult*, 107.

[553] Hayes, "Atonement," 13.

[554] The term here, *psym*, in addition to being used to describe Israel's rebellion against God, as in Is 1:2; Jer 2:8; 33:8, but also for political rebellion of a political inferior or vassal against a superior, as in 1 Kings 12:19; 2 Kings 1:1; 3:5–7; 8:20, 22. John B. Geyer, "Blood and the Nations in Ritual and Myth," *Vetus Testamentum* 57 (2007): 3.

of Atonement ritual as being in addition to that which is purified by the iterative sacrifices. Others see the defilement which is remedied by the Day of Atonement rituals as being resultant from more serious sins, or sins of more dire consequence, than the lesser and minor sins handled through daily rituals. At the core of this discussion is the question concerning whether the Day of Atonement duplicates the purpose of the other offerings or whether it cleanses impurity which is somehow not addressed by the others.[555] The key distinction is precisely that element which is now under discussion, namely the fact that the scope of the Day of Atonement ritual extends to the physical reality of the sanctuary, camp, and nation itself, not only the human person who offers the sacrifices and the human persons for whom he offers them.

The Day of Atonement ritual, in contradistinction to the regular, periodic offering, is expressly said to purify the sanctuary itself. By purifying the sanctuary, it covers the sins of the priests and the people. The other regular offerings purify the offeror of ritual impurity or sin and thereby restore a disrupted relationship between that person and God. The impurity in the sanctuary itself, which makes the presence of God threatening to the priests, the people, and the community as a whole, still requires covering to preserve the beneficence of God's presence with his people.[556] The rituals are therefore not directed at different sins, nor different categories or gradations of sin, sinfulness, or uncleanness, but rather at the purification of persons on the one hand and the sanctuary itself on the other.

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[555] Gane, *Cult*, 42.

[556] Gane, *Cult*, 136-142.

3. Ritual and Reenactment

Rituals are, by nature, activity, not static texts. However, in the case of ancient Hebrew ritual in general and the Day of Atonement in particular, the only access we have to the rituals in question is through texts. These texts, like all liturgical rubrics, never fully capture the ritual action in its entirety, as the texts' descriptions omit countless nuances of movement and speech.[557] The only words mentioned in the description of the Day of Atonement ritual are the pronouncing of the sins of the people over the scapegoat. The text does not indicate precisely how this was done, in what words or with what prayers. Likewise, the details of how precisely blood was sprinkled with a finger, with what motion, is not stated. This body of detailed knowledge can be assumed to have existed in the form of tradition passed down from high priest to priest within the priestly families.

There are, in fact, several details of the ritual rubric which must have been present in the enactment of the ritual as described in Lev 16 which this chapter nonetheless omits.[558] For the blood to be sprinkled in the sanctuary, the blood must be drained and collected from the relevant animals. The text does not describe this process. As per Ex 30:17–21, the high priest would have ritually purified himself between each stage of the overall Day of Atonement ritual, though this is not here made explicit. The descriptions of Lev 16 are self-referential for purposes of abbreviation, as in v. 14–15 when the high priest is instructed to do again "likewise." Lev 16 also

[557] Gane, *Cult,* 4.

[558] Gane, *Cult*, 220.

assumes a knowledge of information from earlier in the text, as the burnt offerings here mentioned would presumably have been performed based on the prescriptions found in Lev 1.[559]

The text of Leviticus as it describes ritual is therefore not offering an exhaustive description of the ritual in every detail as an instruction manual or a serving book. Neither is the text of Leviticus a theological treatise on atonement as such or sacrifice or the symbolism of blood. Rather, the text serves to characterize the significant elements of the ritual aimed at its core perceived function and to interpret the prescribed activities in light of that function.[560] The other details of the performance, though they may have at various times been ascribed some form of theological meaning, are not key to the ritual's overall purpose and therefore are not important to the text. Neither is the text interested in drawing out every worthwhile interpretation or aspect of the ritual's perceived meaning, but only that related directly to its overall functioning.

Ritual, as delineated in the Torah, contains a strong element of reenactment, not for the sake of simple remembrance, but to bring about participation in the event in question and its subsequent results.[561] One clear example of this occurs in the rituals surrounding the Passover, the first of the major ritual observances of Israel delineated in the Torah. The meal was eaten using only unleavened bread and as if preparing for a journey to bring about participation in the event and thereby an experience of personal deliverance from bondage by God (Ex 12:11, 13:8).

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[559] This is suggestive of, but does not require, a unity of source or composition for the various ritual portions of the book of Leviticus as a whole. Gane, *Cult*, 220–221.

[560] Gane, *Cult*, 21.

[561] What is being discussed here is ritual, not theological concept or theological function. Whatever function sacrifice in the abstract might have been conceived to fulfill, or even whether or not a given deity desired sacrifice, is a different question altogether than the issue of how precisely sacrifices were to be performed once it was established that they were to be done for whatever theologically defined purpose. This is true without reference to belief, or lack thereof, in the divine origin of particular ritual instructions. If one believes that God instructed sacrificial ritual to be enacted in a particular way, it is still worth asking why in that way as opposed to another and what that ritual procedure is intended to enact. Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 6.

This same paradigm plays a part in ritual sacrifice and the rituals prescribed for the Day of Atonement. The liturgics of sacrifice contains a reenactment of the breaking of covenant relationship with God, namely death, and the ritual enactment of restoration of that relationship.[562]

Ritual acts themselves, in their performance, bring about states of mind including repentance, the memory of constitutive events, and communion with God.[563] Discussion of the ritual surrounding the Day of Atonement, therefore, aims at elucidating the states of mind which the particular ritual elements produce. This argument must begin from the position of the ritual itself and proceed to the enacted reality rather than vice versa. While ritual action can produce such realities, those realities do not necessarily, by their nature, require a particular mode of ritual enactment.[564]

A given ritual act can, for example, have multiple meanings in varying contexts.[565] For example, while the ritual described for the Day of Atonement includes two sin offerings which are similar to those performed periodically to bring about the forgiveness of sins in individual cases, their presence within the remainder of the Day of Atonement ritual gives them a new context which provides them with an additional and somewhat different meaning. The ritual act itself is distinct from the meaning ascribed to that act, and the movement of inquiry must proceed from act attached meaning.

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[562] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 4.

[563] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 20.

[564] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 20.

[565] Gane, *Cult*, 4.

The meaning of the ritual actions discussed here is not abstract, theological meaning existing as a concept. Rather the meaning of a ritual is its goal, that which the proper performance of the ritual accomplishes. A ritual does something or is seen to do so, and this purpose forms its meaning.[566] So, for example, the meaning of the sprinkling of blood in the sanctuary can be said to be the purging of impurity and sin because this is what the proper performance of the sprinkling as a ritual accomplishes.

The Day of Atonement ritual is introduced not as an acontextual set of liturgical commands but as a response to the death of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron. The first stages of the ritual, in particular, are the ritual procedures for the high priest to safely enter into the presence of God using incense and a personal sin offering.[567] The presence of God itself is purgative and to survive that presence the high priest must have already cleansed himself of sin and defilement. The high priest ritually enacts this cleansing through both the act of sacrifice and the covering cloud of incense which prevents the high priest from directly beholding the presence of God himself.

The consuming fire of his holiness means that the presence of God in the midst of the people represents a danger to the people. The danger is not the result of some ill intent or inherently wrathful nature of God but rather because sin and that which is unclean cannot exist in his presence. The initial purification and consecration of the tabernacle and its furnishings, as well as the consecration of the priests and the people, produced a status quo within which God could safely dwell amongst them in the tabernacle. By defiling the sanctuary, sin and uncleanness in the camp disrupted this equilibrium. Even the residuum of these acts made it no

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[566] Gane, *Cult*, 12–14.

[567] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 22-24.

longer safe for priests or people and so ritual atonement must take place to reenact this status quo. Not only must the priests and people be re-consecrated, but the tabernacle and all of the utensils and furnishings therein must also be re-dedicated.[568]

The ritual immediately entails the death of two animals, though the text does not describe their death in any great detail as to mode, manner, or place. The key focus in Lev 16 is rather on what is to be done with the blood. The death of the animals, therefore, is a means to an end in extracting their blood, which the following chapter will further explain by identifying the blood as the life of the animal. The blood is therefore taken and repurposed.[569] Additionally, the sacrificial act is seen to be a repetition of the action which broke the status quo or enactment of the potential threat which the act seeks to alleviate.[570] The animals, however, are only slaughtered after first having been presented before God, and this in and of itself is part of the ritual offering as a "setting forth."[571]

In another episode of sacrificial mimicry, the two goats suffer the two fates threatened for disobedience to the prescriptions of the Torah, namely death and exile, both of which represent destruction.[572] Nevertheless, the scapegoat is not actively slain, ritually or otherwise, but is rather abandoned to its fate in the harsh world beyond the borders of the camp.[573] Abandonment by

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[568] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 22–23.

[569] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 25.

[570] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 26–27.

[571] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 28–29.

[572] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 30–31.

[573] It is clear from several Second Temple Jewish texts that by the first century CE the scapegoat would typically be followed, tied to a shrub, and left to die. *Barnabas* 7.8. In other periods it was pushed off of a crag or cliff to ensure its death. *Mishnah*, Yoma, 6.6. It is likely that these practices originated in order to prevent the goat from returning to the camp in its wanderings. This death is clearly differentiated, however, from sacrificial killing. The scapegoat is not sacrificed to the hostile spiritual powers to which it is sent.

God to the present world and its powers from whom God had delivered the people from Egypt, as represented here by the figure of Azazel, therefore represents another potential danger separate from physical death. These likewise represent the two possible results of God's presence in the midst of an unclean and sinful people. Either the fire of his presence will consume the people, or God will be forced to depart from them.

The central ritual act connected to the purification of physical space and its contents is the use of the blood extracted from the bull and the sacrificial goat. The blood is drained from the animals and collected. The high priest then takes it into the holiest place, once protected by the cloud of incense, where he sprinkles it first. The presence of the blood within the sanctuary sanctifies it as sacrificial blood. It is then able to be used to sanctify and cleanse the altar.[574] The blood is sprinkled and spread throughout the sanctuary physically and symbolically covering everything. As they lead to death, sin and rebellion are represented by the destruction of life, by killing and the shedding of blood. The shedding of sacred, sacrificial blood and its spreading cover over this blood with blood that is holy and pure, thereby silencing the cry for vengeance (Gen 4:10). This idea of blood covering blood is brought out plainly in Num 35:33, in which only the blood of the murderer can cover over the blood of the murder victim as it cries out from the land that the blood of the victim pollutes.[575]

Blood is used in the ritual in this way, as a purifying agent regarding the material sanctuary, in only two cases. Blood was used to purify the outer altar as a means of consecrating it for the offering. The other case is the ritual of the Day of Atonement itself in which it was used

[574] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 38.

[575] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 40.

on the altar as well as within the innermost holy place.[576] Blood in this context of purification offerings is applied only to the physical objects of the tabernacle, especially the altar, and not to human persons. There are, however other offerings in which blood is sprinkled upon the people, notably the covenant affirmation at Sinai (Ex 24:5–8), the ordination of priests (Lev 8:22–24), and at the healing of certain skin diseases (Lev 14:12–14, 25).[577] In these cases the blood is also sprinkled on an altar, creating a blood-based connection between God and the people sprinkled.

Although the blood which is sprinkled on the altar ritually purifies the altar and the other elements of the sanctuary, in the remainder of the Levitical legislation it can be seen that in covering the sin or uncleanness which contaminates the sanctuary. It absorbs the contamination and so is treated as a defiled and therefore dangerous substance.[578] Lev 6:20 presents one example of this understanding. Though the blood here mentioned is blood which has been used for holy purposes upon the altar, if it splashes on a garment, the garment is not rendered pure and holy by that contact. Rather, the garment must be purified through ritual washing and the pot in which it was washed must be destroyed.

That it was seen to be defiled adequately explains why the high priest would not sprinkle this blood upon the people as part of the ritual action of the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement ritual does not see the blood as covering the sins of the people which remain in some way upon the people, in which case the blood would be sprinkled or wiped upon them. Rather, the Day of Atonement seeks to purify the sanctuary which brings about the forgiveness of the

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[576] Gane, *Cult*, 163.

[577] Gane, *Cult*, 164.

[578] Gane, *Cult*, 166.

sins of the people as a result of that purification.[579] The purification of the sins of the individual offerors is handled through the repetitive offerings throughout the year and is applied to them ritually in those contexts. By the time the annual Day of Atonement arrived, persons who had contracted ritual impurity or who had sinned had either made use of the provided remedies through cleansing and offerings or had suffered the punishments, notably death or exile, for their refusal to do so. The Day of Atonement itself, then, did not purge sins from the people but the sanctuary.

The cleansing of the sanctuary with blood is rightly called an atonement "for the sanctuary" although the sanctuary is not an agent capable of sinning. It purges away and removes the defilement which accumulates as an obstacle, obstructing the relationship between God and his people. This obstruction must be dealt with, and the ritual metaphors of wiping away, purging, cleansing, or covering over, all deal with the removal of such an obstruction.[580]

The language of atonement is used in this way in non-liturgical contexts as well. A prime example occurs in Genesis 32:21. Before meeting his brother Esau, Jacob seeks to atone to his presence, literally face, in the hope that they will be able to reconcile after Jacob having wronged him.[581] How he does this is to, through offerings given to his brother, seek to remove the matter of contention between them so that reconciliation will be possible. He cannot, by his desiring it, reconcile his brother to himself. He can, however, facilitate and make possible such a reconciliation.[582]

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[579] Gane, *Cult*, 175.

[580] Gane, *Cult*, 194.

[581] Gane, *Cult*, 194.

[582] The reconciliation of Jacob and Esau, then, is an example of both propitiation and expiation. Rather, it shows how both of these concepts are combined in the act of making an offering of atonement.

Likewise, when the language of atonement concerns God in the context of ritual such as the Day of Atonement, God is neither the subject nor the object of the verb.[583] A ritual does not atone God to the offeror in a way akin to ritual magic. Neither does God atone people to himself in the context of the Day of Atonement ritual.[584] Rather, the defilement, in particular of the sanctuary, has intruded between God and his people and must be cleansed and purged away to restore the previous relationship, the dwelling together reflected by the presence of the tabernacle in the midst of the camp.

The verb "forgive" does not appear in Lev 16, nor in either of the other passages which deal with the prescribed rituals for the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26–32; Num 29:7–11). This emphasis, as well as the emphasis on fasting and other ascetic practices for Yom Kippur, constitute later developments.[585] Though forgiveness is a result of purification and cleansing, it is not the end in itself. Rather, the removal of sin and defilement restores the state of existence within the camp, with God dwelling at its center, which prevailed after the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt.[586] The removal of sin and corruption represents a return to freedom from its harmful effects, freedom to serve Israel's God.

There are, in fact, not so subtle shades of the Passover ritual contained within the Day of Atonement ritual. The fate of the goat driven into the wilderness to Azazel is essentially parallel

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[583] Gane, *Cult*, 195.

[584] This constitutes a distinction in the way in which 1 John 2:1–2 understands the atoning sacrifice of Christ in a way superior to the older ritual. Christ is both the offered, as expressed in the syntax of 2:2a and the offering intercessor in 2:1. In this sense, in light of 4:10, God does propitiate himself through the offering of his Son.

[585] With the destruction of the Jerusalem temple the prescribed ritual aspects of the Day of Atonement could no longer be performed. They have been replaced in the Rabbinic period by an emphasis on repentance and seeking forgiveness through ascetic practices. This is not only the replacement of one ritual enactment with another but a change in the perception of what is accomplished through these practices on the day of observance.

[586] Gane, *Cult*., 234.

to the fate of the Israelites under the oppression of the Egyptians and their gods, against whom God rendered judgment in the Passover event (Ex 12:12). Likewise, the smearing of blood here reconstitutes the people of God first constituted through the smearing of blood on doorposts in Egypt (v. 13). Israel was freed from serving Pharaoh to serve God. The sin and defilement resulting from Israel's disobedience, which impedes that service, are done away with through atonement, allowing this service to begin anew. Through the Day of Atonement's ritual enactment, Israel is restored to its newborn state.

While caution is important when utilizing cross-cultural comparisons, Babylonian and Ugaritic rituals surrounding the temple enact the purging of the temple from the forces of evil in their defeat.[587] The sin and uncleanness of the sanctuary described and remedied by the Day of Atonement ritual are not personified in the sense of being represented by evil spirits or other forces in the sanctuary proper. However, sin is itself represented as a malignant force that attaches itself to the physical reality of the tabernacle and its contents.[588] Rather than the defeat of these forces in battle, the sin and defilement itself, seen as an ontological reality, are purged from the tabernacle and what lies within it. The tabernacle is then once again holy and able to accommodate God's presence. The holiness of this space keeps the malign spiritual powers represented by Azazel at the margins of the community, either the borders of the camp in the wilderness or the later national border. The ability of the high priest to place the sins of the people onto the scapegoat, and the latter's capacity to carry the sins away into the wilderness, both also imply the ontological reality of sin.[589]

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[587] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 41; Geyer, "Blood," 4.

[588] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 41.

[589] Gruenwald, "Sacrifice," 42.

Leviticus and the Torah as a whole envision sin and uncleanness not merely as legal infractions and ceremonial status respectively, but as an ontological reality within the camp and among the people which adheres in particular to the tabernacle as the center of the people's life. The presence of sin and uncleanness is incompatible with the presence of God in the midst of the people. God's holiness purifies the area of his presence in a way which threatens to destroy the people with their sins on the one hand or to force the people out of his presence and back into the world and the domain of the powers from which he had previously redeemed them on the other.

The people, the priests, and the tabernacle as God's dwelling had to be purified and cleansed to remove this danger and reestablish the holiness of the camp. In addition to the regular sin, guilt, and peace offerings taking place periodically, the Day of Atonement represents an annual rite of purification for all of these. Not only is sin covered and removed, but the effects of sin and uncleanness are also purged from the sanctuary to allow for God's continued presence among his people and the people's continued presence with him. Sin, therefore, is seen to not only be an issue between persons, individually and collectively, and God, but also to represent a defilement of the created order itself, including the inanimate creation.

First John understands the atoning sacrifice of Christ against this background of the corruption and purification of the material, created world. Centered on 1 John 2:2d, the Epistle argues that the purification of the tabernacle or temple, the camp or the nation, has now been extended to encompass the whole world and its contents. Therefore, by apostatizing, the secessionists not only cut themselves off from the forgiveness of their sins such that they remain in them. They effectively return themselves to slavery in Egypt or exile themselves out of the realm of God's presence and holiness and into the world which lies under the power of hostile spiritual forces through continued corruption. Such exile brings to bear the additional threat of

God's eschatological wrath when they experience God's holiness and presence in an impure state (1 John 4:17–18).

VII. CONCLUSION

The intra-Jewish hypothesis regarding the identity of the opponents addressed by 1 John has greater explanatory power than the commonly advanced alternatives. The Johannine community was a community with a Jewish self-identity into which schism entered through the secession of a certain party. This party recanted the profession that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. The purpose, then, of 1 John is to address these secessionists, their apostasy, and to elaborate the consequences thereof. Further, it was written to shore up the Johannine community as it existed after the departure of these opponents of the Epistle's author.

The currently predominant hypothesis regarding the identity of the opponents holds that they constituted a group genealogically related to later Gnostic sects. This proto-Gnostic group's primary point of departure from the Johannine community under this hypothesis is a docetic Christology. This hypothesized group of opponents and the alternative community which they are thought to have established are then commonly paralleled with known historical sects of the late first and early second centuries CE. The most common candidates are the Docetists proper and the Cerinthian sect of Gnosticism. In all of these cases, both the hypothetical reconstruction of the beliefs of the opponents and much of the beliefs of the historical sects in question are the subjects of conjecture.

More crucially, this hypothesis and other less popular hypotheses advanced by Raymond Brown and others lack explanatory power. They find their derivation from particular texts within the Epistle. They do not, therefore, interpret those texts or explain them in virtue of having

been derived from them. Interpreters treat other texts as irrelevant to the opponents as they do not fit the conjectural views of the opponents' community. These hypotheses thus lack explanatory power for those other texts as well. They, therefore, represent purely hypothetical recreations of little interpretive value.

The intra-Jewish hypothesis, in contrast, accounts for the texts traditionally considered to directly address the opponents. At the same time, it opens new avenues of inquiry regarding the remainder of the text of the Epistle, including the texts typically not considered relevant to the secessionists' beliefs. Further, the hypothesis that the Johannine community was of a Jewish character allows for the reading of the themes of 1 John against the background of Second Temple Judaism and its varied literature. The intra-Jewish hypothesis, therefore, has the explanatory power to connect these themes and interpret the Epistle as a whole as well as its sundry parts.

First John 2:2 is a key text for this discussion. Based on a perceived lack of relationship to the views of the opponents, interpreters have not discussed this text regarding the various hypotheses regarding the identity of the secessionist party. Interpreters have, through the history of interpretation, applied 1 John 2:2 to then contemporary debates concerning the nature of the church rather than its place in the text of the Epistle. They have therefore treated the text as a sort of aside within the argument of 1 John. The background of the intra-Jewish hypothesis, however, integrates the teaching of 1 John 2:2 into the argument of the Epistle as a whole and as part of a confluence of themes surrounding the world and atonement.

The text of 1 John 2:2 ought to read in English translation, "He is himself the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the whole world." No emendation of the text is necessary for its proper interpretation in English. The concept of atonement referenced

here and in 1 John 4:10 is a full-orbed understanding of atonement including both expiation, the removal of sin, and propitiation, the turning away of potential destruction through being consumed by the fire of God's holiness. It is tied directly to the Day of Atonement ritual as understood in Second Temple Jewish sources of the first century. Christ offers himself as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people, the Johannine community, and also for the whole world. The world is understood in 1 John to be the created order as physical space and its contents. This created world has fallen under the power of malign spiritual forces rendering it hostile to Christ and those who are in him, the righteous. Christ's atoning sacrifice not only serves its expiatory and propitiatory role for the sins of the Johannine community, but it also cleanses the whole world, the created order, of the corruption and curse which have rendered it hostile. The cleansing of the world takes place through Christ's overcoming of the world, removing it from the realm of the power of the evil one and sanctifying it as sacred space.

Two lines of argumentation support this understanding of 1 John 2:2 and its relation to the other major themes of the Epistle. The first of these is the structure of 1 John as a whole. First John 2:2 is part of a parallel with 2:1 in describing Christ's high-priestly role. He is an intercessor in 2:1 and both offeror and sacrificial offering in 2:2. These two verses serve as a pivot point in the argument of the text. They function as the climax of the textual unit from 1:5–2:2, which describes Christ's blood as cleansing and purifying the sins of the community in terms redolent of the Day of Atonement ritual. They likewise function as the introduction to the textual unit from 2:1–6, which conditions the statement of 2:2 by restricting the forgiveness of sins to those who are in Christ, indicating that 2:2 cannot be indicating the sins of all of those in the world.

The text of 1 John as a whole bears a cyclical structure which when understood serves to connect the argument of 1 John 2:2 to 3:8. The relationship of these two texts further describes Christ atonement for “the whole world” as involving the destruction of the works of the devil and tracing themes through the text of the Epistle also links 1 John 2:2 to 5:19 which states that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. The world has come under the power of the evil one through its corruption. This corruption has come to pass through the works of the devil accomplished through human agents. Christ has been revealed to destroy these works and become the savior of the world by cleansing this corruption and curse.

In addition to this argument from the structure of the Epistle, the conceptual world of Second Temple Judaism parallels the understanding underlying 1 John’s argument. Cain, as referenced in 1 John 3:12, was seen in early Jewish and Christian interpretation as the first agent of human sinfulness under the influence of malign spiritual powers. His sin and wickedness were seen to extend corruption and curse to the physical world in which he dwelt. Further, his immediate descendants continued to become more and more wicked as each generation taught the next evil and sin and all were taught by fallen spiritual beings. The chief of these beings as identified in Second Temple Jewish literature was Azazel, the named figure in the Day of Atonement ritual.

This ritual practice on the Day of Atonement served the function of not only dealing with the sins of the people by consigning them to Azazel but of purifying corruption and curse from the camp and, later, the nation. This atonement for the physical creation centered around the sanctuary and its contents as physical space and objects through the blood. The sanctuary was the place in which this corruption and taint collected over the year to be purified. Cleansing the corruption from the sanctuary had the secondary effect of removing the means by which malign

spiritual powers could lay claim to the physical space and contents. The removal of corruption and curse constituted them as sacred space and confined hostile spiritual powers to the wilderness realm outside of its boundaries.

Christ's death, per 1 John 2:2, as the Day of Atonement *par excellence*, purifies his people of their sins, freeing them from the threat of danger from the wrath of God. It also purifies the whole world as physical creation and its contents from the curse and corruption brought about by sin, through which the devil has laid claim to it. This understanding of the argument of 1 John 2:2 unites several themes within the Epistle as a whole. That it results from a reading of the text against the background of the intra-Jewish hypothesis makes this understanding of 1 John 2:2 further evidence for the explanatory power of that hypothesis.

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